

I BECAME YOUR FATHER: REDISCOVERING THE FATHER METAPHOR
FOR PASTORAL MINISTRY IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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REV. STEPHEN L. WOODWORTH

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To my greatest gift, Carrie.

Your love introduced me to the Father.

Your grace gave me courage to become one.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- AB** *The Anchor Bible*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1976.
- BECNT** *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, edited by Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H Stein. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics.
- BST** *The Bible Speaks Today*, edited by John Stott. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- ConBNT** *Coniectanea Biblica New Testament* series, eds. Samuel Byrskog and Kari Syreeni. Philadelphia, Fortress Press.
- IBT** *Interpreting Biblical Texts* series, edited by Gene M. Tucker & Charles B. Cousar. Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1997.
- IVPNTC** *InterVarsity Press New Testament Commentary*, edited by Grant Osborne. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- JSNT** *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
- NICNT** *New International Commentary in the New Testament*, edited by F.F. Bruce. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1987.
- NIGTC** *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, edited by I. Howard Marshall, Donald A. Hagner. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000.
- IVPNTC** *InterVarsity Press New Testament Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- PNTC** *Pillar New Testament Commentary*, edited by D.A. Carson. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans.
- NTC** *New Testament Commentary*, edited by Siomon J. Kistemaker. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993.
- TNTC** *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, edited by R.V.G Tasker. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- WBC** *Word Biblical Commentary*, edited by David A. Hubbard, Blenn W. Barker and Ralph P. Martin. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Press.
- WCF** *The Westminster Confession of Faith*

ABSTRACT

This thesis considers the importance of biblical metaphors in pastoral ministry. After demonstrating the importance and value of metaphors, it presents the father metaphor as a valuable addition to current metaphorical language in use.

Due to widespread difficulties with pastoral identity and cultural confusion about the role of biological fathers, this thesis sets forth a rediscovery of the term “father” which can be applied to pastoral ministry in the twenty-first century. By conducting research in the areas of historical theology, biblical theology, psychology and leadership studies combined with semi-structured interviews, the following work proposes that the use of the father metaphor in pastoral ministry is a valuable addition to current pastoral metaphors already in use.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Shortly after becoming Pope in the year 590 AD, Pope Gregory the Great produced a work entitled the *Pastoral Rule* in which he set about the task of describing in great detail the nature, duties, and obligations of clergy in relation to the “heaviness” of their work.¹ Centuries later, in preparation for a “Day of Humiliation” held on December 4, 1655, Richard Baxter published his own work entitled *The Reformed Pastor*. Amidst rampant complaints against clergy, Baxter’s work was dedicated to the task of “showing the nature of the pastoral work” in an age of growing distrust of ordained ministers.² Both works attempted to speak with authority into what appeared to be widespread confusion about the role of pastors in their respective eras.

While far reaching in their influence, neither work was entirely novel in terms of its subject matter. In the centuries before and after these works were first published the issue of pastoral identity was scarcely ever absent in the writings of those concerned about the nature and influence of the Church.³ In every epoch since the inception of the Christian movement, pastors, theologians and scholars of every variety have added their voices to the growing amount of literature dedicated to answering the question, what is a pastor?

¹ Saint Gregory the Great, *The Book of Pastoral Rule* in *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, ed. Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace, Vol. 12 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), B1.

² Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor: A Discourse on the Pastoral Office*, ed. Samuel Parker (William Baynes, uncopyrighted, 1808). The phrase “showing the nature of the pastoral work” first appeared as part of the title of the book in the 1657 edition.

³ For a comprehensive overview of changes in pastoral identity see H. Richard Niebuhr and Daniel Williams, *The Ministry in Historical Perspective*, eds. (New York: Harpe & Brothers, 1956).

While each author has considered their own age as an age of crisis of varying degrees for pastors, the sheer multitude of voices throughout the generations lends itself to the more sobering proposition made by William Willimon when he observed, “Because of its nature, pastoral identity is never secure. In every age the church must ask, what are pastors for?”⁴

In our own age the search for pastoral identity is no less persistent. As a new generation of pastors and theologians rise to positions of leadership there is a fresh dialogue emerging about the current state of pastoral identity captured in the sentiments of David Fisher when he asserts “The literature on contemporary pastoral ministry is remarkably diverse but tends to agree that we are at a crisis point and that at least part of the problem is pastoral identity in our modern society.”⁵

The specific reasons given for the current confusion regarding pastoral identity varies from author to author. In his article “Seeking Pastoral Identity” John Johnson considers the primary issues to be deficiencies in pastoral theology, the present culture and the rise of a relativistic and pluralistic society.⁶ Alternatively, James Gustafson suggests that the key issues are the rise of volunteerism, loss of pastoral authority and the pursuit of relevance.⁷ In addition to these suggestions are many others who agree with

⁴ William H Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 2002), 12.

⁵ David Fisher, *The 21st Century Pastor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 24.

⁶ John Johnson, “Seeking Pastoral Identity,” *The Spurgeon Fellowship Journal*, Fall 2007, 1.

⁷ James M. Gustafson, “The Clergy in the United States” in *Professions in America*, ed. Kenneth Lynn (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1967), 70.

Eugene Peterson who mourns a loss of respect in the very term “pastor,” which he sees as being “defined by parody, and diluted by optimism.”⁸

While the particular reasons given may wax and wane, the fact remains that it is essential for every pastor to return again and again to the core question of their identity if they hope to remain faithful to their calling. Indeed, as one writer put it, “Doubtless a major cause of ‘burnout’ in ministry is the blurring of pastoral ministry.”⁹ While there are numerous causes for this blurring, I want to focus briefly on two issues specifically that I perceive to be particularly hazardous to pastoral identity in the twenty-first century: congregational expectations, and an emphasis on “doing” rather than “being.”

Congregational Expectations

In order to grasp a key cause of pastoral identity issues one needs only to take a cursory scan of the latest classifieds in order to find churches looking for leaders who are simultaneously Chief Executive Officer (CEO), fund-raiser, expositor, counselor, marketer, spiritual mystic and missionary. In such a climate pastors often find themselves at the mercy of the felt needs of their congregations who appear to be searching for pastors who are “experts” in every area of Church life. Surrounded by a myriad of competing voices, David Steele has observed that today “There are many more involvements for the modern pastor than merely the preaching and pastoral calling of a simpler day.”¹⁰ In an attempt to meet such expectations many pastors find that their

⁸ Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 15.

⁹ Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1983), 5.

¹⁰ David A. Steele, *Images of Leadership and Authority for the Church: Biblical Principles and Secular Models* (New York: University Press of America, Inc., 1986), xi.

pastoral identity is being shaped more often by external pressures and expectations than internal convictions or values. Reflecting on the dilemma many pastors face in this regard

Brian Williams writes:

Competing visions, explanations expectations, and job requirements for pastoral ministry are handed to us from a myriad of sources. Our culture, former pastors, professors, authors, parents, friends, and parishioners all speak into our pastoral identity and, welcome or not, subtly inform our understanding of what we have been called to, shaping the way we think and act. Becoming clear about the nature of the pastoral call is imperative because we live into those implicit visions we harbor and into explicit visions we esteem and nurture in our mind's eye. Critical to the process of becoming a pastor is to move beyond the stereotyped images of minister we encounter and perpetuate.¹¹

Out of all of the competing voices Williams alludes to, many scholars agree that the voice of the individual congregation tends to speak the loudest. The results of one study conducted by professors at Drew University Theological School highlighted this issue by researching the pastoral expectation of first-year seminary graduates. A key finding of the research was that "beginning clergypersons [are] almost completely at the mercy of the expectations of their first parish, without counterbalancing claims from denomination or profession. Formation of clerical identity depended on satisfying this first congregation."¹²

This is not to suggest that pastors cease in their attempts to discern and respond to the real needs of their congregations, after all, "one cannot serve Christ without serving people."¹³ However, the more fundamental problem in most cases is attempting to meet the *misinformed* and *unrealistic* expectations of congregations whose values are

¹¹ Brian Williams, *The Potter's Rib: Mentoring for Pastoral Formation* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Regent College Publishing, 2005), 21-22.

¹² Janet Fishburn and Neill Q. Hamilton, "Seminary Education Tested by Praxis" in *Christian Century* 1-8 February 1988, 108.

¹³ Joe E. Trull and James E. Carter, *Ministerial Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 25.

sometimes shaped more by business practices or the entertainment industry than pastoral theology. A quick perusal of prominent ministry employment websites¹⁴ reveals that, instead of being lead by “pastors,” more and more churches are organizing their congregations around leadership teams, boards, and directors. Similarly, instead of looking for “ministers” an increasingly number of churches are busy recruiting technicians and producers with a proven track record of creating relevant and inspirational atmospheres. The current atmosphere of Church culture lends support to the thoughts of Eugene Peterson when he writes:

Congregations get their ideas of what makes a pastor from the culture, not from the scriptures; they want a winner, they want their needs met; they want to be part of something zesty and glamorous...I am having the depressing experience of reading congregational descriptions of what these churches want in a pastor. With hardly an exception they don't want pastors at all- they want managers of their religious company. They want a pastor they can follow so they won't have to bother with following Jesus anymore.¹⁵

Given these realities, pastors in our current age are experiencing great difficulty in their attempts to develop an internal, pastoral identity independent of those they serve. Identity is a deeply personal matter, and while community plays a key role in helping one to become more fully aware of their identity, pastors often find themselves giving in to the temptation of allowing the community to determine a pastor's identity for them, instead of affirming and illuminating the identity the pastor has already discerned for themselves. Nevertheless, pastors have more to blame for their identity issues than merely their congregations, for pastors themselves contribute equally to the problem by

¹⁴ Cf. Church Staffing (www.churchstaffing.com); Christian Job.com (www.findachristianjob.com); MinistryList.com (www.ministrylist.com) or ChurchJobs.net (www.churchjobs.net).

¹⁵ Marva Dawn and Eugene Peterson, *The Unnecessary Pastor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2000), 4.

defining their own lives and identity by activities and tasks rather than an internal foundation which runs deeper than outward success or failure. In essence many pastors have determined who they are based on what they *do* rather than any conviction about who they are called to *be*.

Emphasis on Doing Rather than Being

At the close of the first decade in a new century, the Church functions amidst a world changing at an unprecedented rate,¹⁶ urging many congregations to attempt to follow suit. As such, pastors today are increasingly tempted to embrace new models of ministry with a utilitarian eye asking, Will it work? Is it relevant? Will it produce results? The potential risk of being considered outdated, archaic or obsolete appears to drive pastors and their congregations in constant pursuit of pragmatic, results oriented programs, which only seems to exacerbate the tendency for pastors to overemphasize activity as a sign of spirituality and success. As David Steele comments, “professional pastoral ministry suffers today from the loss of a sense of accomplishment amidst an ever-increasing burden of busyness and pressure.”¹⁷ Richard Neuhaus agreed, and the words he penned over thirty years ago seem as relevant today as ever. He wrote,

Pastors harassed by these conflicting expectations and claims upon time and ability are tempted to embark upon an open-ended game of trade-offs. Today I’ll be a little of this and a little of that; tomorrow I’ll be a little of the other thing and something else. For the conscientious who are determined to keep the game going, it is a certain formula for confusion and collapse.”¹⁸

This overemphasis on “doing” the work of the Church appears to be creating an

¹⁶ Cf. Fritz Kling, *The Meeting of the Waters: 7 Global Currents that Will Propel the Future Church* (Colorado Spring, CO: David C. Cook 2010).

¹⁷ David A. Steele, *Images of Leadership and Authority for the Church: Biblical Principles and Secular Models* (New York: University Press of America, Inc., 1986), xi.

¹⁸ Richard John Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry: A Critical Affirmation of the Church and its Mission* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1979), 35.

atmosphere of diminished reflection for pastors leading to less clarity about their identity.

The danger lies in the often unforeseen consequences that, when a pastor begins to believe the lie that they *are* what they *do*, they can begin to view everything as a task, including the people they serve. Often the end result is what Joe Trull refers to as “clerical agnosia.” He writes:

Every seminarian knows that a call to become a minister of a church is a call to various tasks. Preaching, teaching, counseling, visiting, administrating, promoting, recruiting, leading worship, and doing community service are just a few of their tasks. Today’s minister must wear many hats. The unseen danger for the busy religious leader is ‘clerical agnosia,’ becoming a minister who mistakes a parishioner for one of his or her hats.¹⁹

While I noted earlier that congregational expectations play a role in this dilemma for pastors, a more hidden, and arguably, more powerful source, lies within the heart and mind of some pastors whose insecurities²⁰ and lack of internal identity cause them to justify their roles daily in constant busyness. Reflecting on his first pastorate David Fisher writes:

As I went about my duties- meeting people, tending to the church, preparing for sermons and lessons, and conducting a wider variety of meetings than I had ever imagined- I suddenly was aware that I didn’t know *who* I was supposed to be... there is little satisfaction in performance of tasks without a clear and foundational identity. Nothing in seminary prepared me for this identity crisis.²¹

In his typically blunt manor, Eugene Peterson blames the predicament of many pastors on a mixture of “vanity” (pastors want to appear important), and “laziness” (pastors allow

¹⁹ Joe E. Trull and James E. Carter, *Ministerial Ethics*, 21-22.

²⁰ Jeff Iorg lists “security” as the second most important character quality of pastors after integrity. Jeff Iorg, *The Character of Leadership* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2007), 47.

²¹ David Fisher, *The 21st Century Pastor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 20, 23.

others to decide how to fill their time).²² His conclusion is simply, “The adjective *busy* set as a modifier to *pastor* should sound to our ears like *adulterous* to characterize a wife or *embezzling* to describe a banker. It is an outrageous scandal, a blasphemous affront.”²³

David Fisher agrees with Peterson, reflecting on his first pastorate he writes,

Fisher’s words appear to be a fair representation of many pastors in America today. Burdened by unrealistic congregational expectations and their own attempts to constantly “look busy,” pastors in the twenty-first century are in need of resources that will guide them towards a fresh perspective on their identity amidst our current culture. However, I do not believe a solution can be found by simply suggesting that pastors simply stop “doing” certain tasks, or that they merely manage more effectively their people pleasing tendencies. Instead, I want to suggest that they begin to focus more intentionally on the development of a more holistic vision of their role. Amidst a constantly growing, and changing list of tasks, pastors frequently function without a sufficient framework through which to determine what is essential to their role as pastors. My hypothesis is that confronted with the ever shifting demands of pastoral ministry, it is essential for pastors to embrace additional metaphors through which they view their vocation and define their calling.

The Way Forward

Admittedly, in pursuit of a solution to the current dilemma there are no shortages of scholars, pastors and theologians who have already suggested a number of alternative

²² Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1989), 18.

²³ Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*, 17.

formulas and models for pastors to embrace.²⁴ The inherent difficulties I have with the majority of them are that many merely exacerbate the constant pursuit of pastors to find something *new*. This lament is shared by Eugene Peterson who argues:

The rationale seems to be that since we are in a century of rapid change, that since so much of what we encounter is unprecedented, and that since there have been quantum leaps in knowledge and technology, anything that worked in an earlier age certainly won't work now. We spend all of our time getting up-to-date. Training must be refashioned. The latest information must be acquired. New techniques must be mastered if we are to be pastors in an age of future shock.²⁵

Into such an atmosphere, Peterson continues, "A mood develops in which there is little respect for the past and even less knowledge of it."²⁶ What I would like to suggest as an alternative in this thesis is that pastors should instead be looking not to the future, but to the *past*, in order to rediscover lost language of the Church that can help to guide them into the future.

At the close of the twentieth century Robert Webber coined the phrase "Ancient-Future" in a series of works dedicated to the notable trend of evangelicals returning once again to the liturgical traditions of the ancient past.²⁷ Since these works, the trend has only increased with a steady flow of church members joining denominations with

²⁴ Cf. Dean R. Hilde and Marti R. Jewell, *The Next Generation of Pastoral Leaders: What the Church Needs to Know* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2010); Aubrey Malphurs, *New Kind of Church, A: Understanding Models of Ministry for the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007); Ronald Richardson, *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership and Congregational Life* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996) or John R. W. Stott, *Basic Christian Leadership: Biblical Models of Church, Gospel and Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

²⁵ Eugene Peterson, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Co., 1980), 2.

²⁶ Peterson, *Five Smooth Stones for Pastoral Work*, 2.

²⁷ Robert Webber's first work in the series was entitled *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999). Additional books that followed included *Ancient-Future Evangelism* (2003), *Ancient-Future Time* (2004) and *Ancient-Future Worship* (2008).

liturgical ties.²⁸ What the research demonstrates is that many people in our current society are rediscovering the value of the Church's historical roots, discerning once again that our collective past has much to offer by way of both richness and depth. While Webber suggests that an emphasis on the sacraments and a sense of mystery are part of the attractiveness of liturgical churches to evangelicals,²⁹ I want to propose that a reconnection to the traditions of the ancient church also has much to offer pastors today by way of the very language they use to describe pastors and their role. What I hope to accomplish throughout this thesis is to bring to the forefront an ancient metaphor that has been largely ignored in recent decades by modern pastors; a pastoral metaphor used by the earliest leaders of the Christian movement, and a metaphor that has as much relevance in our own century as it did in the first, the metaphor of the "father."

My purpose in doing so is two-fold. First, I am convinced that the very language pastors use to describe themselves and to reflect on their work in pastoral ministry significantly affects how they view themselves and their vocation. Secondly, I am equally convinced that because biological fathers play such a central role in the life of every congregant, use of the father metaphor can possibly enhance pastors' sense of connection to their spiritual families by the use of consistent metaphors that enforce the communal identity of family. In doing so the father metaphor has the potential of paving the way for clearer pastoral identity in their roles while serving in a shifting culture full of varied expectations and increased temptations towards busyness.

²⁸ For denominational growth and decline statistics see *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*, ed. Eileen W. Lidner (National Council of Churches, 2011).

²⁹ In his work *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail* (New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing, 1989), Webber suggests a total of six reasons including a sense of mystery in religious experience, a Christ-centered worship experience, a sacramental reality, a historical identity, a feeling of being part of Christ's entire church, and a holistic spirituality.

The Importance of Metaphors

Central to my belief in pastoral metaphors is my conviction that metaphors, quite simply, matter. As Richard Neuhaus once observed, “It is not an academic exercise but a day-to-day struggle to make sense of who we are and what we are doing. Models are crucial to this struggle because, in a very down-to-earth manner, we all live from models. That is, none of us lives a life of raw facts. We live in a world of interpreted fact, and models are controlling concepts in that interpretation.”³⁰

As such metaphors “shape the context of our experience as a meaningful whole, deciding in the process not only what is primary and what derivative, but also who we ought to be and how we ought to act...a metaphor is a mask that molds the wearer’s face.”³¹ Biblical writers understood this same principle and went to great lengths to portray leaders through a myriad of metaphors including shepherd, ambassadors, witness, athlete, architect, and mother (Cf. Jer 3:15; 2 Cor 5:20; Acts 1:8; 2 Tim 4:7; 1 Cor 3:10; 1 Thess 2:7). In addition to the others mentioned above, the Apostle Paul also chose to use the metaphor of the “father” to describe his role among the fledgling churches (1 Cor 4:15; 1 Thess 2:11). It was a term that would later be passed on to the future leaders of these new faith communities and employed well into the early centuries of the Christian movement by the church fathers.

The power of metaphors lies in their ability to transfer meaning from one object to another in ways completely distinct from other communication devices. While a simile allows this transfer of meaning to happen through *explicit* comparison between objects

³⁰ Neuhaus, *Freedom for Ministry*, 33.

³¹ Erazim Kohak, “Of Dwelling and Wayfaring: A Quest for Metaphors,” in Leroy S. Rouner, ed. *The Longing for Home*, Boston University Studies in Philosophy and Religion, volume 17 (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996), 31.

using the words “like” or “as” (i.e. “he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel *like* a child serving his father.” Phil 2:22), metaphors make comparisons *implicitly*. For example, when Isaiah speaks to God saying, “For You are our Father” (Isa 63:16), he transfers the collective understanding of the roles and expectations of an earthly father to God himself, appealing to him as the one who is faithful, providing protection and justice to His heirs. Despite the fact that simile and metaphor are used almost interchangeably in some writing, their subtle differences should not be overlooked. Due to the explicitness of the strictly comparative nature of similes (denoted by the presence of the word “like” or “as”), reification is far less likely to occur. There is a guard, so to speak, from taking the comparison too far. In short, similes provide boundaries.

When using metaphors however, the full range of meaning is far more easily transferred, for better, or for worse. To say that “Paul is *like* a father to the church at Corinth” is to invite editing in the interpretation. The reader/hearer has an opportunity to envision in what ways Paul may or may not be like a father and transfer those attributes accordingly. On the other hand, to say “Paul *is* a father to the Corinthian church” allows for a virtually unbridled transfer of the full emotional and conceptual range of meaning of the word “father” for his audience.³²

With that said, it should be noted that metaphors have inherent weaknesses as well. Since metaphors lack the essential boundary markers of similes (“like” or “as”) that allow two entities to remain independent of one another, as is the case in Isaiah 1:18 when the author states that “sins are *like* scarlet” where “sins” and “scarlet” remain independent entities, overuse of metaphors causes them to run a greater risk of atrophying

³² For a fuller discussion of biblical metaphors see Tim Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 31-41 and David W. Bennett, *Metaphors of Ministry: Biblical Images for Leaders and Followers* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004).

into literal speech. For example, if someone speaks of seeing “the light at the end of the tunnel” or of “having a heart of stone,” a hearer no longer needs to reflect on the original sources of these metaphors to understand what a person is trying to communicate. The metaphors themselves immediately convey that a difficult time will come to an end soon, and that someone lacks compassion. The metaphors in these instances have moved from a metaphor into literal speech. When such a fate falls on a metaphor scholars consider it to be a “dead metaphor.”³³

According to Adele Reinhartz, there is a subtle difference between a “living and “dead” metaphor which “lies in the relationship between metaphor and model.”³⁴ In her seminal work entitled *Metaphor and Religious Language*, Janet Martin Soskice described the dynamic by stating that “an originally vital metaphor calls to mind, directly or indirectly, a model or models.”³⁵ In the case of the father metaphor, scholars disagree widely on whether it remains dead or alive. Certainly the formal use of the term for Roman Catholic clergy for millennia has hastened its transfer into literal speech, and yet, recent protests against the metaphor from scholars such as Scott Bartchy, who suggests that the Apostle Paul’s vision for the New testament church is “a family without fathers”³⁶ is, perhaps, the greatest evidence of its vitality. One must ask why would there be a call for a dismissal of the metaphor if it were already dead.

Using Soskie’s evaluative statement above, it is the perspective of this author that

³³ Adele Reinhartz, “‘Father’ as Metaphor in the Fourth Gospel” *Semeia 85: God the Father in the Gospel of John*, ed. Adele Reinhartz, (2001), 7.

³⁴ Reinhartz, “Father as Metaphor in the Fourth Gospel”, 7.

³⁵ Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language*, 15.

³⁶ Scott Bartchy, “Undermining Ancient Patriarchy: The Apostle Paul’s Vision of a Society of Siblings.” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 29 (1999), abstract.

it is precisely because the father metaphor in pastoral ministry still calls to mind models, whether negative or positive, that it should be considered alive and well in our modern era, and should be considered to be an important metaphor that shapes the identity of the twenty-first century, American pastor. Furthermore, the father metaphor is an effective one for pastors due to the fact that it reinforces and coincides with the metaphorical language of the Church as a “family.” As one author put it “The pastor’s metaphor for church determines his or her metaphor for ministry.”³⁷ As such, pastors not only use metaphors to help them define their own identity, but by extension, the identity of their congregations as well. With this in view Eugene Peterson suggests that the family should be a *primary* lens through which pastors view their vocation. He writes:

The pastoral vocation does not take place primarily in a school where subjects are taught, nor in a barracks where assault forces are briefed for attacks on evil, but in a *family*- the place where love is learned, where birth takes place, where intimacy is deepened. The pastoral task is to use the language appropriate in this most basic aspect of our humanity- not language that describes, not language that motivates, but spontaneous language: cries and exclamations, confessions and appreciations, words the heart speaks.³⁸

David Bennett agrees referring to the family metaphor as “one of the most common” and “one of the most important metaphors in the New Testament.”³⁹ In addition to explicit use of the word “family” (cf., Rom 8:12-17; Heb 12:5-11; Rev 21:7), members are commonly addressed in familial terms such as “mother” (1 Thess 2:17), “children” (2 Cor 6:13) and “brothers and sisters” (1 Cor 14:20; 1 Tim 5:2). Indeed, this view of the church found convincing support from Jesus when he asked pointedly, “Who

³⁷ Kenneth Gardner, “Metaphors for Church and Ministry,” *Sustaining Pastoral Excellence* newsletter, March 2007.

³⁸ Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*, 63.

³⁹ David W. Bennett, *Metaphors of Ministry: Biblical Images for Leaders and Followers* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 73.

is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Looking to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother (Matt 12:48-50)."

Given the preponderance of family metaphors, it is quite understandable why someone like the Apostle Paul would feel the liberty to address himself as a father among the congregations he had founded. In fact, history bears witness to the fact that in the centuries that followed, the Church not only embraced but reinforced the use of the father metaphor as an apt term to denote the unique responsibilities a pastor embraced in the care of their congregations, a spiritual father to their spiritual families.

Even in our modern times congregations continue to live out the implications of familial metaphors, even when such metaphors are not explicit. Consider for a moment the way in which a congregation responds to the moral failure of a pastor today. If a community did not implicitly support the ideal of a pastor as a spiritual head of a family, why should such failures experience the deep seated feelings of betrayal and abandonment shared by many in the wake of such public failures as a Ted Haggard, Gordon McDonald or Jim Baker? I want to suggest that it is precisely this connection that the Bible makes when it associates the ability of elders to lead God's people with their ability to lead their families (Tit 1:6) Why make the ability for one to lead their biological family a litmus test for leading God's spiritual family unless the responsibilities to each are at least similar? The comparison seems arbitrary at best if one cannot concede that in the first century world of Christianity pastors were considered to be spiritual fathers to God's children, expected by their parishioners to serve them in ways similar to the fashion that they serve their biological families. And it is this important connection

between spiritual and biological fathers that leads me to my second rationale for suggesting the father metaphor.

The Centrality of Fatherhood in Society

In addition to the fact that metaphors can play a significant role in identity formation, the second reason I find the father metaphor to be so compelling is due to the fact that fathers are so central to the human experience. The reality is that every human who has ever lived has had, for better or worse, a personal experience with a father. For some the thought of a father elicits a deep sense of love, trust and security. For others the word can bring forward a rush of emotional wounds including shame, abandonment and fear. As such no one encounters the word “father” with emotional or psychological neutrality. Indeed, “Fatherhood is one of the least understood and most mysterious relationships in our lives.”⁴⁰ If this is true, I want to contend that the centrality of fathers to the human experience serves as a strong support for its inclusion among current pastoral metaphors.

Despite disagreements about their specific role and value, until recently, few would have ever disagreed that fathers are central figures in the life of every child. According to David Popenoe, “Across time and cultures, fathers have always been considered by societies to be essential...Indeed, until today no known society ever thought of fathers as potentially unnecessary.”⁴¹ So while society is busy engaged in debates about the role of biological fathers, research reveals that “the United States is

⁴⁰ Samuel Osherson, *The Passions of Fatherhood* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1995), xi.

⁴¹ David Popenoe, *Life Without Father: Compelling New evidence that Fatherhood and Marriage are Indispensable for the Good of Children and Society* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1996), 3.

becoming an increasingly fatherless society”⁴²

Into such a climate it is my conviction that the church appears to have an unprecedented opportunity to minister to the deep wounds of the nearly 40 percent of American children who will sleep in homes tonight without a father.⁴³ Add to this the untold number of others for whom, while father is in the home, he remains an oppressive, abusive figure and the opportunity expands exponentially. These are children whose lives are already touched statistically by the ramifications of a steady increase in domestic violence, out-of-wedlock births, divorce rates, and violent crimes among youth.⁴⁴

Studies show that when compared to children raised in a home with both parents, children who grow up in homes without fathers are five times more likely to die by suicide;⁴⁵ nine times more likely to drop out of school;⁴⁶ nine times more likely to end up in a state operated institution;⁴⁷ ten times more likely to abuse chemical substances;⁴⁸ fourteen times more likely to commit rape;⁴⁹ and twenty times more likely to end up in

⁴² David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 1995), 1.

⁴³ Child Trends calculations of U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement. "America's Families and Living Arrangements." Tables C-2, C-3. Available at: <http://www.childtrendsdatabank.org/?q=node/231> (accessed April 13, 2012).

⁴⁴ Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America*, 1.

⁴⁵ U.S. D.H.H.S., Bureau of the Census. What is perhaps most shocking about this statistic is that males and females are affected by their fathers disproportionately. When compared to females who grow up without a father this same source demonstrates that males are 200% more likely to take their own life than females.

⁴⁶ Ralph B. McNeal, Jr., "Extracurricular Activities and High School Dropouts," *Sociology of Education*, vol. 68, (1995), 62-81.

⁴⁷ U.S. Dept. of Justice, "Special Report," September, 1988.

⁴⁸ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Center for Health Statistics, "Survey on Child Health," Washington, DC, 1993.

⁴⁹ Raymond Knight & Robert Prentky, "The Developmental Antecedents and Adult Adaptations

prison.⁵⁰

What these statistics suggest, observers have already agreed upon for centuries; the influential role fathers play in the lives of their children, and by extension, to their entire society, cannot possibly be overestimated. Margaret Mead has gone so far as to state that the supreme test of any civilization is its ability to create fathers who accept their paternal roles and readily fulfill their responsibility to nurture their offspring.⁵¹ David Blankenhorn put it more bluntly when he wrote, “a good society celebrates the ideal of the man who puts his family first.”⁵² In light of such a litmus test one must wonder how the state of our own union might be characterized. Could it be said that our culture’s firm belief in, and encouragement of, fathers is steadily producing a new generation of sacrificial, loving, responsible dads? Or is the reality much closer to the lament of Joachim Duyndham who observed that, “according to numerous media reports, the formerly respectable father has in recent times turned out to be a workaholic, aggressive, or abusing figure.”⁵³

Research suggests that, like pastors, biological fathers are also experiencing a great identity crisis of their own in America today. This is due in part because a father’s role and identity and is not as clearly defined as that of a mother whose identity is shaped largely by the act of giving birth. Margaret Mead was one of the first to address this issue

of Rapist Subtypes,” *Criminal Justice & Behavior*, Vol 14, p. 403-26, 1978.

⁵⁰ “Fulton Co. GA Jail Populations,” TX Dept. of Corrections, 1992.

⁵¹ Margaret Mead, *Male and Female: A Study of Sexes in a Changing World* (New York: Dell, 1969), 195.

⁵² Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America*, 5.

⁵³ Joachim Duyndam, “Credible Fatherhood and Unique Identity: Toward an Existential Concept of Adoption.” *The European Legacy*, Vol. 12, No. 6, (2007), 729.

in her work *Male and Female* where she proposed that fatherhood is primarily a social construct.⁵⁴ As James Garbarino explains it, “Unlike motherhood, paternity is always in doubt, and belief in one’s paternity is always an act of faith based in a particular relationship and person. It is also faith in the strength and validity of a set of social conventions designed to structure the roles of men and women. Thus, fatherhood is essentially a social invention with diverse forms.”⁵⁵ In the years since Mead first published her findings, numerous sociologists and anthropologists, like Garbarino, have shown support for her findings including David Blankenhorn,⁵⁶ James Furrow,⁵⁷ and Ralph DeRossa.⁵⁸

If these sentiments are indeed true, than according to Joachim Duyndam, perhaps what is needed more than just the creation of a society of good fathers is the *re*-creation of a belief in fathers, the *re*-creation of a society in which the role of fathers is seen as essential rather than optional. In a word, what fatherhood desperately needs is a restoration of its “credibility.”⁵⁹

In light of this uncertainty regarding the role and identity of biological fathers today the need seems only to be heightened for pastors to embody this role and ideals in

⁵⁴ Mead, *Male and Female*, 195.

⁵⁵ James Garbarino, “The Soul of Fatherhood,” *Marriage and Family Review*, Vol. 29, No. 2/3 (2000), 13.

⁵⁶ David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (New York, NY: Harper Perrenial, 1995).

⁵⁷ James L. Furrow, “The Ideal Father: Religious Narratives and the Role of Fatherhood,” *Journal of Men’s Studies*, volume 7 issue 1, Fall 1998.

⁵⁸ Ralph LaRossa, *The Modernization of Fatherhood: A Social and Political History*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

⁵⁹ Joachim Duyndam, “Credible fatherhood and unique identity: Toward an Existential Concept of Adoption.” *The European Legacy*, Vol. 12, No. 6, (2007), 730.

their larger communities, not to replace the role and importance of biological fathers, but to highlight it. Not out of a callous insensitivity to the large percentage of their parishioners who are suffering with wounds from their father, but with a new vision which affirms that precisely *by* embodying God's ideal for fathers, restoration and healing might finally be found for men and women under their care. Indeed, I believe what M.J. Dawn has written regarding the father metaphor for God, is equally true for the metaphor's potential impact for pastors:

I know that many theologians today argue that we should not use the term Father because it is oppressive to those who have been abused by their human fathers. I believe, to the contrary, that such people need more than anything to know God as "Father." By asserting this point I am not denying the need also to recover the feminine images for God in the Bible. However, our human psyches require both a mother and a father. If a person has been deprived of the security of a loving father's care, then the worst thing we can do is to take away from her any possibility for finding it. The best gift we can give is to introduce her to the true Father, the only one who can genuinely meet her needs for fathering. We can help her to acknowledge--and perhaps eventually to forgive--the failure of her human father to be the image of God he was designed to be. Most of all, we can demonstrate for her the true love of a real Father.⁶⁰

Potential Problems with the Father Metaphor

In recent decades the term "father" has suffered increasing scrutiny amidst a culture punctuated with debates raging over definitions of families, women's rights, gay rights, and reproductive rights. Add to this a growing suspicion with the abuse of power and institutionalized hierarchy that has punctuated numerous scenes in Church history and the problems related to its adoption grow exponentially. In such a climate I present the father metaphor with the understanding that there are a number of reasons pastors may consider it an unwise metaphor for their work in the new century. Of particular importance are the arguments laid against the metaphor from two streams: biblical and

⁶⁰ M.J., Dawn, *Sexual Character: Beyond Technique to Intimacy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1993), 79.

denominational tradition, and the cultural perception of fatherhood.

First, many consider Jesus' command to "call no man father" quoted in Matthew's gospel (Matt 23:9) to be quite a logical end of any discussion about the use of the father metaphor in pastoral ministry. One such critic of the father metaphor in the last decade has been Scott Bartchy who writes of this passage, "in the name of Israel's God, Jesus proclaimed a new concept of kinship that rejected the authority of the patriarch and filial piety."⁶¹ Likewise Joseph Hellerman, another outspoken opponent of the father metaphor writes, "The surrogate kin group of followers gathered by Jesus had no earthly father. Because of their identity as God's offspring, Jesus instructed his disciples to regard one another as siblings and to call no man father."⁶² While a fuller discussion of this text will follow in chapter two of this work, suffice to say at the outset that Jesus was not forbidding the metaphorical use of the title, but rather the prideful and self-serving pursuit of the honor attributed to the title. Nonetheless, the traditional interpretation of the passage, particularly by Protestants, requires it to be taken seriously recognizing the legitimate arguments it levels against the adoption of the father metaphor.⁶³

Related to this argument is the distrust of the metaphors use by recent scandals in the Roman Catholic Church that have greatly marred the term in the minds of many Americans.⁶⁴ While this thesis seeks to explore the metaphorical rather than the literal

⁶¹ Scott Bartchy, "Undermining Ancient Patriarchy: The Apostle Paul's Vision of a Society of Siblings." *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 29 (1999), 71.

⁶² Joseph H. Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2001), 101.

⁶³ Cf. Donald Senior, *The Gospel of Matthew, IBT* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1997), 157.

⁶⁴ For many, when the word father is mentioned in reference to pastors their minds drift towards men such as John J. Geoghan, who, in a report published in January of 2002, was exposed as a pedophile who had abused children as young as four years old for thirty years.⁶⁴ As the article tore through the

use of the title “father,” the truth remains that for many people discussions of religion and paternal imagery cannot be divorced from denominational traditions and stereotypes. As newer reports have revealed the widespread nature of the abuse scandal, it is quite understandable why many would chose to side with Hellerman when he observes, “Among the various images that make up the church-family model, the father metaphor has the greatest potential for abuse.”⁶⁵

Declining Cultural View of Fathers and Fatherhood

Hellerman and Bartchy are not alone in their critique of the father metaphor. Other scholars, such as Antoine Vergote, have raised the voice of suspicion as well. He writes:

The whole history of religions points at the importance of some human characters which mediate the divine. Judeo-Christianism particularly exemplifies the Father image as a symbolic mediation of God the creator, the author of the word and of the choice, the Father of Jesus Christ. *Nowadays, the cultural and psychological meaning of fatherhood is one of the most controversial realities.*⁶⁶

The truth is that Vergote first penned these words in the early 1970’s at a time when the world had only just begun to experience the seismic changes occurring globally in regards to issues of gender, redefinitions of family, or the soon-to-come effects of the historic verdict in *Roe v. Wade*. In the years since his book was first published the confusion and controversy surrounding the meaning of the father has only heightened in

America psyche it spawned the revealing of a torrent of similar reports throughout the nation. What drew national attention to Geoghan’s case was not the sheer number of horrific acts that he committed, the age of his victims or even the duration of his activities. What pierced the soul of millions nationally, and what would eventually send shockwaves reverberating internationally as well, was the fact that John Geoghan was a Catholic Priest, known to every one of his victims as “Father.” See Matt Carroll, Sacha Pfeiffer, Michael Rezendes; ed. Walter V. Robinson, “Church Allowed abuse by Priest for Years,” *The Boston Globe*, January 6, 2002.

⁶⁵ Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family*, 220.

⁶⁶ Antoine Vergote, “Parental images and Representations of God,” *Social Compass*, Vol. 19 Issue 3, 1972, 432 (emphasis mine).

its intensity. In the midst of this unfolding crisis, David Blankenhorn wrote a highly influential book at the end of the last century entitled *Fatherless America* in which he asked pointedly, “does every child need a father?”⁶⁷ His question was not merely rhetorical as evidenced by some scholars who have begun to wonder out loud if the answer might simply be “no.”⁶⁸

Due in part to the fundamental changes brought upon families at the dawn of the industrial revolution, many in the American society since the 1920’s have increasingly viewed the ideals of the “traditional father” as completely outdated and fallen.⁶⁹ The consequences of this trend are no less apparent in our own age as Blankenhorn shares, “as a cultural ideal, our inherited understanding of fatherhood is under siege. Men in general, and fathers in particular, are increasingly viewed as superfluous to family life: either expendable or as part of the problem.”⁷⁰

In the absence of positive support from cultural spheres, it might be tempting for some to maintain the notion that our current climate of poor and/or negative father models makes the metaphor too controversial to adopt. Despite the fact that the church has referred to its leaders as “father” for millennia, today the Church is confronted with a society within which there is no standard framework from which to build the metaphor. Presently the concept of fatherhood appears to be divided among those who view it as an

⁶⁷ David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America*, 2.

⁶⁸ The term “androgyny” has been used recently in regards parental roles, particularly within the last decade. Defined simply, “androgyny” is the mixing of genders, or the dissolving of the distinctions of either. In particular “androgynous parenting” is the view that mother and father are interchangeable allowing some to also propose that fathers are superfluous and even unnecessary. For further discussion see David Blankenhorn, “The Unnecessary Father,” *Applied Ethics*, 2nd ed., eds. Larry May, Shari-Collins Chobanian, Kai Wong (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1994), 352-361.

⁶⁹ Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America*, 152.

⁷⁰ Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America*, 2.

unnecessary facet of an outdated patriarchal society, those who view it negatively because of abuse, those indifferent to it due to the absence of a father, and those, like Munroe Myles, who would defend it as the antidote for all the ills of our world. He writes, “The key to the restoration and preservation of a sane and healthy society is the salvaging of the male, especially as a responsible father.”⁷¹

Given these cultural and historical realities it is not difficult to grasp the depth of the problem surrounding the father metaphor in pastoral ministry. By simple extension, as the cultural symbol of father has declined in the home, so has the power of it to be applied as a metaphor in the church. In such an environment a key question becomes whether pastors should simply forgo use of the metaphor until cultural expectations return that justify its use, or whether pastors should actively participate in reshaping the definition of fathers by embodying roles, values and ideals that call fathers back to their influential place in their homes and in society at large.

It has become apparent to me throughout my research that those who continue to view the father metaphor as unnecessary or outdated appear to fail to take into consideration the long-term implications of a wholesale dismissal of the metaphor based on poor historical and cultural examples of fatherhood. Despite the fact that the cultural definition of “fatherhood” may have been greatly marred by the fatherless generation of the last century in America, fatherhood in general, “fatherhood” as a social concept, fatherhood as created and initiated by God, still remains a powerful force through which our Creator has chosen to communicate his most intimate attributes.

⁷¹ Munroe Myles, *The Fatherhood Principle: Priority, Position and the Role of the Male* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2008), 9.

As one considers the fact that, literally, millions of Americans pour into congregations each week to find healing and hope fostered by the wounds, some induced by distant or absent fathers, and pastors in particular serve on the spiritual frontlines of a nation that simply cannot afford to lose any more fathers. Expounding further on Freud's view of the connection between fathers and the faith of their children Paul Vitz surmises, "Once a child or youth is disappointed or loses respect for his earthly father, belief in a heavenly father becomes impossible."⁷² While Vitz' conclusion has been disproved by numerous examples throughout history (including the example of my own life), his assertion highlights the highly influential nature of a father's role in the development of their children's spiritual lives. In such a society I perceive that the Church and its leaders are presented with a great opportunity. As mediators of the divine, pastors are uniquely positioned to serve the world as paternal archetypes who can model God's ideal for father/child relationships.

Situated in such an emotionally charged climate I readily admit that ours is a time when the future for the father metaphor for pastoral ministry sits at a pivotal moment in history, alive but *threatened*. In such a time I find hope in the sentiments of Timothy Laniak when he argued that, "Metaphors can come out of 'retirement', brought back into service at any time by any user, as long as there are hearers who understand the contextual elements."⁷³ If pastors intend to faithfully serve in the name of the God who is "father to the fatherless" (Ps 68:5) in an age when American youth are the least likely in the entire Western world to grow up in a home with both parents,⁷⁴ the time to bring the

⁷² Paul C. Vitz, *Faith of the Fatherless* (Dallas, TX: Spence Publishing Company, 1999), 16.

⁷³ Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherd After My Own Heart*, 9.

father metaphor out of retirement is certainly now.

Personal Interest

My personal interest and bias in regards to the father metaphor in pastoral ministry stems largely from my life's perspective as a father, son and pastor. I am a man who has experienced the pain and confusion of the divorce of my parents and the unintended consequences it brought into my relationship with my biological father. I am also a father myself to three, incredibly wild sons, as well as a pastor to college students. Some of these students who come to our campus arrive here from broken families, burdened by fractured relationships with their own earthly fathers. Many come seeking wholeness and healing, looking for answers to daunting, and difficult questions, and looking for reconciliation with the one who created them, the one who calls himself Father. Given these realities it would seem quite logical that pastors would find great value in employing the father metaphor while conducting their daily work in caring for fragile souls.

As a college chaplain I have had a front row seat to the carnage many American fathers have left in their wake. A young man struggling with pornography confessed to me once in my office that when his parents divorced his father tied a mill stone around his thirteen year old neck when he told him in his parting words, "you're the man of the family now." Another young woman sat sobbing in my office as she retold the long, sordid story of her relationship with her father that concluded with her refusal to allow him to come to her college graduation or the privilege of walking her down the wedding aisle. I meet annually with a man who struggles with alcohol abuse, to remember together

⁷⁴ *National Center for Health Statistics*, 2005. Report can found online at <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/>. Accessed March, 2012.

the day his father committed suicide. I have a weekly mentoring session with a young man whose relationship began with me the day we prayed together during his father's trial that he wouldn't be sent back to prison. Another young woman who was abused by her father bought me a model ship for my birthday and tells me repeatedly that I am the father she never had.

But the damage is not limited to the young. An untold number of adult men and women as well walk through life with what a number of scholars have referred to as "the father wound."⁷⁵ For this reason I am convinced that we are entering an age when an increased number of people are searching for God without the benefit of healthy models through which to guide their belief in a Creator who calls himself Father; in desperate need of spiritual fathers and mothers who are willing to embody the ideals that God originally intended for the terms to possess.

Boundaries of the Research

It should be noted from the outset that this thesis is neither an examination, defense or refutation of the official title of "father" used by Roman Catholics or some Anglicans, nor is it an examination or defense of the metaphor of God the "Father." Both topics, while somewhat relevant to the following study in various capacities, have already achieved significant attention from other scholars⁷⁶ and further exploration of either

⁷⁵ Cf. Norman Wright, *Healing for the Father Wound* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2005); Linda Schierse Leonard, *The Wounded Woman* (Boston, MA: Shambhala Publications, Inc., 1982).

⁷⁶ On God as Father see Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing God the Father Through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007) or John Miller, *Calling God "Father": Essays on the Bible, Fatherhood and Culture* (NJ: Paulist Press, 1999). On the father as a title see Scott Hahn, *A Biblical Theology of the Covenant Priesthood: The Priest as Son, Father, Bridegroom and Brother* (West Covina, CA: Saint Joseph Communications, February 2, 1999) or Dermott Power, *A Spiritual Theology of the Priesthood: The Mystery of Christ and the Mission of the Priest* (Washington, D.C.: T & T Clark Ltd, 1998).

would only serve to broaden this study and inhibit the attention and focus this topic demands. Instead this thesis will focus on the importance of the father metaphor for pastoral ministry in the twenty-first century.

In addition, it is important to clarify that I have chosen to further focus this study intentionally on only male pastors from the United States. My rationale for doing so is twofold. First, the length of this thesis is prohibitive in doing justice to the myriad of complexities involved in exploring both paternal and maternal metaphors. Each deserves the kind of full-length treatment the space provided simply disallows. Secondly, while I believe there are certain ways in which this thesis can be beneficial for women in ministry, including the exploration of pastoral identity and dealing with cultural views of family and marriage, my choice of the father metaphor applies more specifically to males in pastoral ministry. It should be noted that in doing so I am not making a theological statement about women in ministry or their capacity for leadership in the church.⁷⁷

Due to the scope of this work I have chosen to center my research exclusively on paternal imagery. Admittedly, there are a number of maternal metaphors in scripture, and one could spend an equal amount of time in the future devoted to discerning the implications of these metaphors in pastoral ministry as well.⁷⁸ In light of the fact that biblical authors recognized the inherent strengths in applying a wide range of metaphors to their task, I believe the following thesis has much to offer both male and female clergy as they seek to devote themselves creatively and faithfully to their calling.

⁷⁷ For an excellent defense on female ordination see John Jefferson Davis, "Incarnation, Trinity, and the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood," *Priscilla Papers*, Vol. 24, Num. 1, Winter 2010, 9-18.

⁷⁸ Cf. Isa 42:14, 49:15, 66:13; Ps 22:9-10a; Matt 23:37; 1 Thess 2:7.

More explicitly, my research on metaphors broadly, and biblical metaphors specifically, has revealed that one of the strengths of metaphorical language is its ability to transcend gender. As pastors, both men and women engage in ministry which requires the ability to draw upon a wide range of metaphors to fit a given task or context. At various times, male and female pastors will benefit greatly by ministering to their congregations through the employment of a myriad of metaphors, including those which have traditionally been viewed as either predominantly “male” or “female” images. Towards this end it is my sincere hope that both male and female clergy can draw equally from the findings of this research with an aim of sustaining a healthier, more holistic view of pastoral ministry that more accurately reflects the image of the God whom they serve.

Conclusion

In conclusion, what will be argued in the pages of this thesis is that in order to fully explain the multiple functions and expectations of pastors one must routinely explore the possibility of rediscovering metaphors that can help to explain more fully the increasingly varied responsibilities of those in pastoral leadership. Despite the claim by some that pastoral metaphors wane in their applicability according to time,⁷⁹ my personal conviction is that instead of usurping the images of shepherd, CEO, administrator, executive, or producer, the father metaphor should be welcomed to the table to join them. Each pastoral metaphor, in its own way, contributes unique descriptors to the varied role of pastoral ministry. Indeed, my personal conviction is that no pastoral metaphor can

⁷⁹ According to Kevin Miller “spiritual parenting transcends the current debate over whether pastors should be shepherds, leaders, agents of cultural transformation, or something else. As a spiritual father or mother, you break free from fads; you don’t invest years of ministry in a model soon outdated. Indeed, your ministry can become more powerful, not less, with age.” Kevin Miller, “From Relevant Dude to Spiritual Father,” *Leadership Journal*, Summer 2011, 46.

stand alone. Instead, my concern is not to decide which single metaphor pastors should use today, but further expand the number of those already in use.

En route to a fuller exploration of the importance and relevance of the father metaphor in pastoral ministry this thesis will move systematically through a thoughtful interaction with a number of historical and biblical themes that will shed significant light on the historical and biblical precedence for the use of the father metaphor. In chapter two I will examine the role of fathers in both Jewish and Greco-Roman societies with an aim of discerning the cultural context from which the term was adopted into ecclesiastical circles. Next I will look at the use of the father metaphor as it developed in the realm of pastoral ministry throughout the ages including the earliest centuries of the Christian Church. In the second half of chapter two, I will provide an overview of the father metaphor as it pertains to God before moving onto a biblical examination of key texts from the New Testament including Jesus exhortation to “call no man father (Matt 23:8-11) as well as the Apostle Paul’s explicit use of the father metaphor in both 1 Corinthians 4 and 1 Thessalonians 2.

After laying a biblical and theological foundation I will present a literature review that touches on the spheres of culture, psychology and leadership with an aim of drawing parallels between the role of biological and spiritual fathers while delineating the historical decline of a clear identity for both. In addition, my research will include interviews with pastors with the goal of exploring the unique value and contributions the addition of the father metaphor can make for the future work of the Church in the world. By exploring fatherhood through each of these lenses I seek to demonstrate that the employment of the father metaphor can greatly enhance the ability of pastors to speak

into a changing culture where their own identity, as well as the identity of biological fathers, teeters on the brink of crisis. I will conclude my work with several practical implications for the employment of the father metaphor in pastoral ministry in the great hope that by doing so the Church will have common language by which a conversation about the father metaphor can be increasingly fostered and explored in the years to come.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATION

Historical Foundations

A full discussion of the use of the father metaphor in pastoral ministry necessitates an examination of both its root and its employment throughout history. Not only is it essential to explore the source and evolution of the metaphor through Church history specifically, but it is also important to observe the role of the father in both Jewish and Greek contexts as well, the original contexts from which the biblical use of the metaphor was birthed. According to Joseph Hellerman, understanding family relationships is one of the keys to comprehending the growth and development of the early Church since it is primarily through social metaphors that the Church identifies and organizes itself. He writes:

Ideological explanations of the rapid multiplication of Christ-confessing communities ultimately fail to satisfy. Sociologists have confronted us with the truth that ideology is inextricably woven into the social fabric of a people. To arrive at a truly comprehensive explanation for the expansion of Christianity, we must somehow move beyond ideology and enter into the social world of the early Christians in order to understand their relations with one another and with their pagan neighbors.¹

As is always true in faithful, biblical, exegesis one must first be informed of the way in which words and phrases are understood by their original audience *prior* to the formulation of a principle relevant to our own times.² Towards this end, the following chapter offers a brief analysis of the role of fathers in ancient Jewish and Greek contexts.

¹ Joseph Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family* (Fortress Press: Minneapolis, MN, 2001), 3.

² For a complete overview of exegetical principles as they relate to the bible see Gordon Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002).

In particular I will focus on the ways in which fathers embodied (or failed to embody) the triune characteristics of fatherhood related to the areas of *identity*, *instruction* and *imitation*. These three areas will serve as the framework through which I describe the essential nature of fatherly roles. In addition I will also compare the roles and functions of leaders in each of these contexts with an aim of offering an overview of the historical transition of the increased use of the father metaphor in the history of the church as it relates to the role of the pastor.

Admittedly, this work intends to demonstrate that the pastoral use of the father metaphor was borrowed from the best of what the word meant in the first century. Though some will argue that doing so ignores what can be proven to be the very worst elements of the father role in the cultural context of the emerging church. Even a casual observer of history could declare that both Judaism and Greco-Roman societies elevated the power of the father to unhealthy extremes. Undoubtedly that power was, at times, allowing for the mistreatment of women and children amidst an environment that afforded little, if any, legal rights. While I have chosen to focus my attention on the counter-arguments to these observations, readers will also find a clear analysis of the darker side of patriarchal societies in nearly every work I have cited in this chapter. While this work focuses on the less frequently cited, positive examples of patriarchs in the first century it does so without ignorance of the great potential for harm that men, and fathers in particular, yielded within the larger social context from which the Christian movement emerged. My primary rationale for focusing on these examples is that pastors serve as mediators of the divine and, as such, have the heavenly father as a primary source from which to draw their image. While earthly fathers serve as significant models

as well, the perfect image of God as a father remains the most significant.

Jewish Fatherhood in the Old and New Testament

Similar in many ways to the rights afforded to Roman fathers, which will be examined later, the father in the Hebrew family had supreme authority over his children. As described in detail throughout the Old Testament, fathers in ancient Israel arranged the marriages of their children (Gen 24, 29), had the right to sell their children (Exod. 21:7),³ and the power of life and death (Gen 22, Judg 11:34ff, Lev 18:21; 20:3-5). From some of the earliest texts in the Hebrew Bible children are explicitly commanded to respect, revere and show affection to their fathers (Exod 20:12; Lev 19:3; Deut 5:16; Mic 7:6; Ez 22:7, etc.).⁴ The fifth commandment, which dictates that children are to "honor thy father and mother," is the first with a unique promise (Eph 6:2) and supports the biblical paradigm that dishonoring parents is considered to be one of the gravest sins (Exod 21:15-17; 1 Tim 1:9; Mal 1:6; Isa 45:10).

In return, Jewish fathers were expected to love their children (Gen 37:4), instruct, and give them commands (Gen 50:16; Prov 6:20; 1:8), guide, encourage, warn (Jer 3:4; 1 Thess 2:11), train (Hos 11:3), rebuke (Gen 34:30); restrain (Eli, by contrast, 1 Sam 3:13), punish (Deut 21:18) chasten (Prov 3:12; Dt. 8:5); nourish (Isa 1:2) and delight in their offspring (Prov 3:12). In addition, an ideal father was expected to be considerate of his children's needs and requests (Matt 7:10), and help shoulder their burdens, or sins (Mal 3:17).⁵

³ A father was refused the right to sell his daughter to a stranger (Neh 5:5).

⁴ I am indebted to Phillip Wendell Crannell for his work in compiling references related to fathers in the Scriptures. See Philip Wendell Crannell, "Father" in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (electronic edition), James Orr, general editor (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1939).

Creation

Despite frequent criticism of the patriarchal nature of ancient Israelite society, it is noted that the substantial power granted to Jewish fathers was wedded to a deep sense of devotion and responsibility. As Robert Hamerton-Kelly writes, “whatever difficulties the ancient Israelite family may have had, those caused by the absence of the father were not chief among them.”⁶

While Jewish father’s played a central role in determining everything from religion to reputation for their families, their chief responsibility within the community was, first and foremost, *procreation*. J.J. Scott observes, “Family was seen as an institution established by God, and the procreation of children his command.”⁷ So great was the emphasis on procreation that if a wife failed to provide a child to her husband after ten years of marriage he was *required* to divorce her.⁸ Within a hostile agrarian world, the birth of children was not only a sign of spiritual blessing from God, but was also the key to a community’s survival. Reproduction was the very means by which armies and farms were provided with workers, the vessels through which religion would be passed along to future generations and the assurance that elderly parents would be

⁵ Philip Wendell Crannell, “Father”, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (electronic edition).

⁶ Robert Hamerton-Kelly, *God the Father: Theology and Patriarchy in the Teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1979), 43.

⁷ J. Julius Scott, *Customs and Controversies: Intertestamental Backgrounds of the New Testament* (Grand Rapid, MI: BakerBooks, 1995), 248.

⁸ While the custom appears to smack of a harsh patriarchal structure, the emphasis here was on the value of children more-so than the devaluing of wives. See Scott, *Customs and Controversies* pp. 246-251 for an introduction of the value of wives in the Jewish context. A counter viewpoint is offered by K.C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman in their discussion of gender in *Palestine in the Time of Jesus*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1998), 23-26.

cared for in their old age.⁹

According to Philo, who is considered by some to be one of the most important Jewish witnesses to parent-child relations in the ancient world,¹⁰ parents, “are to their children what God is to the world, since just as he achieved existence for the non-existent, so they in intimation of his power, as far as they are capable, immortalize the human race.”¹¹ From this perspective, while God was recognized as the ultimate Creator, Jewish communities also believed that he uniquely enabled parents to serve in significant roles in the creation process as well. While cooperation in the creation process was clearly bestowed upon parents, fathers were given important responsibilities for their children’s welfare from conception until death.

Secondly, once children were brought into the community fathers had a further obligation to instill in their children a sense of identity among the community. From a biblical perspective this is most clearly seen in the often repeated phrase “...son of...” found in many of the genealogical narratives of the Old Testament (cf. Gen 11:31, 23:8; Exod 31:2; Num 1:5-15). Being the son of a particular father¹² established the core of one’s identity. It located one in the historical timeline of the community as well as determined one’s social status, profession, and homeland.¹³

⁹ T. Rees, “Barren; Barrenness” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (electronic edition), James Orr, general editor (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1939).

¹⁰ Trevor Burke, *Family Matters: A Socio-Historical Study of Kinship Metaphors in 1 Thessalonians*, JSNT 247 (New York, T&T Clark International, 2003), 37.

¹¹ Philo, *Spec. Leg.*, 2.225 in Trevor Burke, *Family Matters: A Socio-Historical Study of Kinship Metaphors in 1 Thessalonians*, 43.

¹² It is important to note that genealogies could also be maternal, tracing lineage back to the mother instead of the father. See Hanson and Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus*, 28-29.

¹³ Hanson and Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus*, 27-29.

Situated within a Mediterranean culture, the nation of Israel was dominated by codes of honor and shame which were often manifested in the males. The patriarchs of a family provided the public reputation of the entire household. In this regard, offspring depended entirely on their fathers to determine their cultural perception. By default, children inherited, for better or worse, the reputations of their father.¹⁴ According to the book of Genesis, the blessing of a godly father brought great good, while his curse had the ability to visit great evil on his descendants for several generations (Gen 9:25-27).

While such a reality may sound rather archaic and unfair to our modern preoccupation with individuality, the very real sense in which fathers explicitly determined the fate of their child's lives provided a considerable number of positive byproducts as well. The notion that whatever honor or shame a father brought upon himself would be carried into the next generation lent additional impetus for Jewish fathers to perform their paternal duties with diligence and great care.

This meant that beyond the physical act of providing the "seed" for procreation, Jewish fathers were also shared great responsible for the ongoing care and nurturing of their children. In contrast to the oppressive, patriarchal interpretations of the father role in early Judaism the historian Josephus describes ideal parents as those willing "to spare nothing that appeared profitable for [their children's] welfare."¹⁵ In fact, Trevor Burke points out at the conclusion of his extensive research on this issue that, "parental obligations far outweigh those of one's offspring."¹⁶ In other words, for all of the

¹⁴ Hanson and Oakman, 29.

¹⁵ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities*, 4.261 in *The New Complete Works of Josephus*, translated by William Whiston (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1999), 159.

¹⁶ Trevor Burke, *Family Matters*, 58.

emphasis on the expectations of children towards their fathers in the ancient world, the evidence demonstrates that the expectations on fathers towards their children were far weightier.

The ongoing nature of the responsibilities of the father can be seen in the Apostle Paul's continuing role among his church plants. Having become the one who "begot" them (1 Cor 4:16), his role as their spiritual father extends to his congregations long after he is physically present with them. It is quite possible that Paul grasped the honor codes of his time and rightly discerned that his own reputation would become the measuring rod for the communities he formed. This caused Paul to spend a great deal of time in almost every one of his letters not only giving clear instructions, but also defending himself against false accusations that threatened to undermine his witness and the authenticity of his apostleship (cf. Gal 1:1-24; 1 Cor 1:10ff; 1 Thess 2:1ff). Consequently, this is also perhaps why a key qualification for elders in the early church was that they be "above reproach" (1 Tim 3:2). Distinct from the Western concept of individual responsibility, Mediterranean cultures commonly organized and evaluated groups (family, professional or religious) based on the life and reputation of their leader(s).

Specifically in regards to identity, Paul certainly recognized that nothing was more important in Jewish family life than the continuation of the family religion. By inviting Jews to embrace Christ as their Messiah Paul was explicitly challenging the power of familial patriarchs and establishing himself as a new father among a new spiritual family just as the Apostle Peter boldly proclaimed that converts to Christianity had been "ransomed from the futile ways inherited from [their] ancestors" (1 Pet 1:18). As such the apostles spent a great deal of time *re-establishing* the identity of their new

congregations. For those who had previously only viewed themselves through the lens of their earthly father, Paul now repeatedly reminded them that their new identity was to be found among the family of God as those who have been adopted by a new Father (Eph 1:5) who bestows on them new honor as heirs of the Kingdom (cf. Rom 8:17; Eph 1:18).

In light of his responsibility for the spiritual birth and ongoing care of his converts, Paul was quite comfortable employing a metaphor that was already widely accepted in religious circles. According to one scholar Paul was cognizant of the fact that, “The word ‘father’ symbolizes, in the full sense of that term, the saving element in history; it recalls the past as the experience of God, in summons, promise, deliverance, and gift. As part of this kind of thinking the human representatives of god are often called ‘father’. This is particularly so with the prophets and the wise men.”¹⁷

Instruction

While many of the duties of parenthood were shared by both parents, instruction specifically was the primary responsibility of the father.¹⁸ As W.A. Strange observes, “to secure the future of the Jewish community it was not enough to have children; they had to be educated in the ancestral faith. It was a proud and justifiable boast of the Jewish people that their education of the young was unsurpassed in its thoroughness and comprehensiveness.”¹⁹

As noted earlier, the responsibility to procreate was foremost among the responsibilities of a Jewish father, and yet as Philo notes, parents are:

¹⁷ Hamerton-Kelly, *God the Father*, 44.

¹⁸ Burke, *Family Matters*, 58.

¹⁹ W. A. Strange, *Children in the Early Church: Children in the Ancient World, the New Testament and the Early Church* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 1996), 13

Also in the position of instructors because they impart to their children from the earliest years everything that they themselves may happen to know, and give them instruction not only in various branches of knowledge which they impress upon their young minds, but also in the most essential questions of what to choose and avoid, namely to choose virtues and avoid vices and the activities to which they lead.²⁰

Likewise, Josephus claimed that the instruction of its children was a distinguishing characteristic of the Jewish tradition considering it “the most important duty in life.”²¹

This parental priority on instruction is encompassed in the Deuteronomical mandate to:

Fix these words of mine in your hearts and minds; tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Teach them to your children, talking about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates, so that your days and the days of your children may be many in the land that the LORD swore to give your forefathers, as many as the days that the heavens are above the earth. (Deut 11:18-21)

As will be further clarified later, Paul recognized the unique responsibility he had as a spiritual father to instruct his church. Distinguishing himself from among the thousands of teachers the church may have throughout their life, his words carried greater weight due to his role in the congregations creation (1 Cor 4:15).

Modeling and Imitation

Finally, Jewish fathers were expected to serve as role models for their children. According to Hassidic teaching “every Jew should conduct himself in such a way that his sons will rejoice to say: ‘The God of my Father.’”²² In addition “the Law orders that they [i.e. children] be taught to read, and shall learn both the laws and deeds of their

²⁰ Philo, *Spec. Leg.*, 2.228 in Trevor Burke, *Family Matters: A Socio-Historical Study of Kinship Metaphors in I Thessalonians* Journal for the Study of the New Testament, 247 9 London: T & T Clark International, (2003), 51.

²¹ Josephus, *Contra Apion*, 1.60-61 in Trevor Burke, *Family Matters*, 52.

²² Louis Newman, *Hasidic Anthology: Tales and Teaching of the Hasidim* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), 117.

forefathers, in order that they may imitate the latter.”²³ Particularly as it relates to pastoral leadership, this aspect of fathering was one that had clear implications for leadership within the larger community. Not only were children expected to imitate their fathers, but members of the community were expected to imitate their leaders. Trevor Burke states, “The imitation of the father is one that is specifically tied and extended to the imitation of the ‘fathers,’ that is, the fathers of the people or nation.”²⁴ These observations bring clarity to Paul’s own desire to be imitated by his followers (1 Cor 4:16) with the emphasis being less on the obligation of the followers as it is the responsibility of the leader to live a life worth imitating.

Fathers in Greco-Roman Culture

Despite the fact that the picture one gleans from fathers in the Jewish culture can serve as a positive example towards the construction of the father metaphor in pastoral leadership, fathers in the Greco-Roman context present significantly more difficulties. As Robert Hamerton-Kelly laments frankly, “in the Biblical families the patriarch was a present father, while in Greece he was absent.”²⁵

Without a doubt one of the greatest contributors to the negative reputation of the Greco-Roman family structure was the institution of the Roman law known as *patria potestas* (Lat. “power of a father”) which afforded the *paterfamilias* (Lat: “head of the family”) in Roman households nearly omnipotent authority. At first glance the law appears less than sinister to modern ears due to the fact that in nearly every civilization parents are charged with significant responsibility over the lives of their children. Even

²³ Josephus, *Apion* 1.204 in Trevor Burke, *Family Matters*, 50.

²⁴ Burke, *Family Matters*, 50.

²⁵ Hamerton-Kelly, *God the Father*, 42.

here in the United States parents are considered “legal guardians” until their children reach the age of eighteen.²⁶ In fact anthropologists and sociologists have demonstrated that holding parents responsible for their child’s physical wellbeing (i.e. feeding, clothing, providing shelter, etc...), education, and moral decisions until a certain age is nearly universally accepted across cultures. However, what set Roman society apart was that with the institution of *patria-potestas* the power and influence of fathers on their children’s lives not only extended throughout the duration of their lives, but was virtually without limit even beyond the death of a father.²⁷

Under *patria-potestas* Roman fathers were granted the right to treat their family as property, determining who their children married, for how long, and which of their children’s possessions the children themselves could claim as their own.²⁸ But by far the most controversial aspect of *patria-potestas* was the right of a father to end the life of his children.²⁹ Describing this aspect of *patria-potestas* law in greater detail, Dionysius of Halicarnassus wrote that fathers had “a virtually total right over a son during his entire life, whether he chose to imprison him, scourge him, place him in chains and set him to work in the fields, or kill him.”³⁰

²⁶ For a complete definition of the rights and responsibilities of legal guardians in the U.S see <http://guardianships.uslegal.com> (accessed April 13, 2012).

²⁷ The law extended the control of children beyond the death of the father by way of transferring the power to *any* living antecedent in the direct, male line. Bruce W. Frier and Thomas A. J. McGinn, *A Casebook on Roman Law: Classical Resources Series*; No. 5 (Oxford, England: New York Oxford University Press, 2004), 189.

²⁸ Frier and McGinn, *A Casebook on Roman Law*, 189.

²⁹ Frier and McGinn, *A Casebook on Roman Law*, 189.

³⁰ Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Roman Antiquities*, 2.26.4 in Andrew Clarke, *Serve the Community of the Church: Christians as Leaders and Ministers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 87.

Nevertheless, some scholars have suggested that Roman society could not have achieved its greatness if certain boundaries were not created around the actual application of the law in everyday life. Accordingly, “Even from an early date, limits on *patria potestas* were already enforced when it came into conflict with the state and civic responsibilities required of Roman citizens. Then the interests of the family yielded to the greater interests of the Roman citizen body.”³¹

This meant that in addition to the rights fathers had over their children, fathers also incurred numerous obligations towards their families which were equally as weighty. For example, while the father had the right to discipline his son (even unto death), the right was “tempered by contrary social constraints, and was probably only theoretical.”³² This view is supported by the Greek moralist Plutarch who urged that, “a father should not use beatings but rather reason, exhortation, counsel and praise of good conduct to instruct his children to follow virtue and shun vices.”³³ Echoing this sentiment Aristotle argued that “The relationship of the fathers to sons is regal in type, since a father’s first care is for his children’s welfare.”³⁴

Despite the fact that the term *pater* (Lat. “Father”) had clear connections to authority and leadership politically, socially and religiously, it also carried significant benevolent connotations due to the obligations placed on Roman fathers to serve as a

³¹ Frier and McGinn, *A Casebook on Roman Family Law*, 192.

³² Beth Severy, *Augustus and the Family at the Birth of the Roman Empire* (New York, Routledge, 2003), 9.

³³ D.A. Carson, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2002), 134.

³⁴ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 8.10.4 in James P. Hering, *The Colossian and Ephesian Haustafeln in Theological Context: An Analysis of their origins, Relationship, and Message* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2007), 222.

moral guides and primary caregivers to their children as well as affectionate and gentle providers for their wives. The father was the civic representative for the family and was typically viewed as both a benevolent and beneficial leader in their community.³⁵

Similar to the expectations of Jewish fathers, Roman fathers shouldered great expectations to procreate. Despite the frequent emphasis on the apparent undervaluing of its children, history reveals a contrasting picture of Roman fathers who greatly celebrated the birth of their children in a ritual known as *amphidromia* (Gk: “walking or running around”) where fathers paraded their newborns around the household hearth as a symbolic gesture of initiation and purification which was followed by a great feast and gift giving.³⁶ The celebration introduced the child to his new family and strengthened the child’s identity as a member of the household of a particular father.

Also like Jewish fathers, Roman’s placed a significant responsibility of instructing their children on the father as well. As Xenophon’s Socrates says:

Nor are parents contented to provide food for their children but as soon as they consider them capable of learning, they teach them whatever good things for living themselves know; and if there is something that they think someone else is more competent to teach, they send [their son] to him as their own expense and try to do everything they can so their children turn out to be as good as possible.³⁷

As was noted earlier, Roman culture was consumed with the health of the polis. So much so that historians regularly note that the division between homes and state was virtually non-existent.³⁸ As such Roman fathers had external motivation to raise children

³⁵ Severy, *Augustus and the Family*, 10.

³⁶ Barry S. Strauss, *Fathers and Sons in Athens: Ideology and Society in the Era of the Peloponnesian War* (London: Routledge, 1993), 1.

³⁷ *Xenophon: Memorabilia*, 2.2.6 in E. C. Merchant and O. J. Todd, *Xenophon: Memorabilia. Oeconomicus. Symposium. Apologia*, Loeb Classical Library No. 168, (1997), 107

³⁸ Strauss, *Father and Sons in Athens*, 36.

who would contribute to the glorious future of the state. Since children (especially sons) were expected to follow in the footsteps of the *paterfamilias*, fathers had extrinsic motivation to maintain a favorable public reputation in the community. While fathers had almost unlimited rights over their children, the unwritten rules of paternal imitation frequently tempered the written ones of the state. Like Jewish communities, Rome was a society of honor and shame which placed significant responsibility on fathers to raise children who brought their family name honor. In Rome, to bring honor on your home was nearly synonymous with bringing honor on the polis.

From this brief analysis of Roman fathers one can surmise the emergence of a paradoxical picture of a culture that simultaneously empowered fathers with unhindered authority while they called these same men to exercise these rights with the goal of creating a society of offspring who were hard working, intelligent, sacrificial, and loyal towards the polis. Nowhere was this seen more clearly than through the ways that the Roman government employed familial metaphors to continually emphasize the significant connection between success at home and the success of the polis.

Fatherhood in Religious and Cultural Leadership

Biological fathers were not the only members of Jewish communities who were referred to as father. Sharing many of the same responsibilities of biological fathers, religious and cultural leaders also functioned as “fathers” to the communities they served. As Janet Soskice affirms, in the Old Testament era, “Just as families are headed by fathers, fathers are headed by leaders of clan or tribe who are ultimately responsible to God.”³⁹

In the scriptures we find that the title *Ab* (Heb. father) is given not only to the

³⁹ Janet Soskice, *The Kindness of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7.

Creator of the universe (Gen 4:20-21) but also to advisors (Gen 45:8, Judg 17:10) and prophets (1 Sam 10:12; 2 Kgs 2:12; 6:21). Incidentally, as K. Kohler writes, “‘The Fathers’ became the standing name for ancient masters of the law. There is little doubt that the Church, in according to their heads the name of *father* simply followed in the footsteps of the synagogue.”⁴⁰

This observation is supported by the fact that the term “spiritual fathers” was consistently used to refer to Rabbis⁴¹ as was the leader in the community at Qumran who also adopted a paternal tradition by likening the role of its pastoral leaders to that of a father.⁴² Of this Joseph Hellerman writes that while a number of Qumran texts point to God as their leader others clearly portray a leader in the community as the sectarian’s patriarch.⁴³

In addition to these examples one finds that the term “father” is also used as a title for a protector, or patron (Job 29:16; Ps 68:5; Deut 32:6) and in the book of Acts the term is used of elders (Acts 7:2; 22:1). “Father” can also express one who is worshipped or revered (Jer 2:27; 2 Kgs 2:12; 5:13; 6:21), as well as the source or instrument of spiritual blessings, and regeneration (1 Cor 4:15; 2 Cor 1:3).⁴⁴

As such it is not entirely necessary to assume that early Christian leaders adopted

⁴⁰ K. Kohler, “Abba, Father Title of Spiritual Leader and Saint,” *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol., No. 14 (July, 1901), 569.

⁴¹ Cf. m. Mak. 2:3; m. Ed. 1:4; m. B.M. 2:11; Sifre Deut. 6:7; b. Sanh. 19b in S.J.D. Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 121-2.

⁴² Cf. 1QH 7:20-CD 13:9 in I.O. Betz, “Die Geburt der Gemeinde durch den Lehrer,” *NTS* 3 (1957), 314-26.

⁴³ Joseph Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family*, 77.

⁴⁴ The compilation of these texts can be found under “Father” in *Faussett’s Bible Dictionary* (electronic edition) generated and owned by International Bible Translators, Inc., (1998).

the term father solely from the sphere of family. During the emergence of early Christianity, religious leaders already had access to the metaphor as a legitimate title for teachers and those who held a position of honor within the community.

Likewise, in Greco-Roman culture, “Family metaphors flourished in Roman society and helped to underline its hierarchical nature...The Romans viewed themselves as, above all, a society of fathers and sons, and the metaphor of the father held a particularly important position among family metaphors in the aristocratic political system of the Republic and later on in imperial Rome.”⁴⁵ Accordingly, the political and social structure of Rome further amplified the laws of *patria-potestas* by extending patriarchal values into every sphere of life. Accordingly, “An assumption underlying the first-century institutions was that the Roman Empire was one big family with the emperor as the *paterfamilias* of its inhabitants. The emperor had the same power (*potestas*) over the Roman world that a father had over his children.”⁴⁶

As a result political leaders such as Cicero compared himself with “a mild father”⁴⁷ while both Caesar and Augustus was designated with the title, “Father of the country.”⁴⁸ The relationship between a consul and praetor was frequently considered to be similar to that of a father and son,⁴⁹ while the consul was explicitly referred to as “The

⁴⁵ Halvor Moxnes, *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as social Reality and Metaphor* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1997), 114.

⁴⁶ Stephen J. Joubert, “Managing the Household: Paul as *paterfamilias* of the Christian Household group in Corinth” in *Modeling early Christianity: social-scientific studies of the New Testament* by Phillip Francis Esler, (London: Routledge, 1995), 213.

⁴⁷ Cicero, *De domo*, 94.

⁴⁸ R.M. Grant, *History of Rome* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1978) 259-60.

⁴⁹ Moxnes, *Constructing Early Christian Families*, 111-12.

Father of the Romans,” a tradition which supposedly dates back to the founding of Rome by Romulus who is considered to be “the father of the fatherland.”⁵⁰ The father metaphor even influenced the sphere of philosophy where teachers such as Epicurus were frequently addressed as “father” by his community of disciples.⁵¹

Given the extensive reach of the father metaphor in Roman society it is hardly difficult to understand why it emerges so early in the life of the Christian church. In fact there is no evidence that the early church struggled in any regard as to whether or not to adopt paternal metaphors into their understanding of leadership. From all indications it appears they simply continued to use the familiar language of their day. However, what is difficult to discern is whether or not the metaphor was employed with benevolent or malevolent intentions.

Those who would dismiss the metaphor as a byproduct of patriarchal Jewish and Roman cultures certainly have sufficient fodder for their arguments. On the other hand one can also glean positive paternal models from each of these contexts by focusing on the equally important examples of the numerous expectations that both Jews and Romans placed on their fathers to be the source of their children’s life and identity; their primary instructors, and to act as men whose lives were worthy of imitation.

The facts one gleans from the brief historical picture provided above is that in both cultures, Jewish and Greek fathers were given the dual privileges of ultimate authority and ultimate responsibility, not only for their immediate families, but by extension, the entire nation and state as well. Without debating further the merits of such an arrangement, one can also safely assume that as the Christian movement emerged in

⁵⁰ Moxnes, *Constructing Early Christian Families*, 111-12.

⁵¹ A. J. Malherbe, “Paul: Hellenistic Philosopher or Christian Pastor?,” *ATR* 68, (1985), 86-98.

the first century these two aspects of the paternal role contributed to their employment of the father metaphor for pastoral leadership.

While scholars have failed to identify the very first appearance of the metaphorical use of father in religious writing outside of the bible with any sense of certainty, most do agree that the very essence of the word “father” has consistently denoted one who has come before and contributes to the creation or ongoing care of future generations. And while writers in the early centuries of the church were not formally referenced as “apostolic fathers” until as late as the sixth century,⁵² a brief overview of their writing presents a rather clear case for the fact that they considered themselves as “fathers” among the new Christian movement.

In one of the earliest documents outside of the New Testament, *I Clement*, one finds use of the metaphor “father” to denote those whom the new assembly of believers should seek to emulate.⁵³ Likewise, early in the second century, Irenaeus wrote, “For when any person has been taught from the mouth of another, he is termed the son of him who instructs him, and the latter [is called] the father.”⁵⁴ Clement of Alexandria penned a similar sentiment when he wrote “Words are the progeny of the soul. Hence we call those who have instructed us a father...Everyone who is instructed is, in respect of subjection, the son of the instructor.”⁵⁵ Other examples of identical rhetoric can be found throughout

⁵² Michael Holmes, Ed., *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 3. The exact phrase is attributed to Servus, the Monophysite patriarch of Antioch.

⁵³ *I Clement* 62.2 in *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Michael Holmes (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 99.

⁵⁴ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.41.2 in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol.1, ed. A. Cleveland Coxe (Peabody, MA; Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1995), 524.

⁵⁵ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.1ff in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 2, eds. Alexander

the writings of Ignatius,⁵⁶ the church historian Eusebius,⁵⁷ and Gregory of Nazianzus⁵⁸ who give some of the clearest expressions of the polity that existed in the earliest centuries of the life of the Church.

Eventually, the unique contributions of each of these writers would be collected and referred to throughout church history as the writings of the Apostolic (or Church) Fathers. According to Johannes Quasten the justification for the use of the term father for these particular men stems from a tradition that preceded them all observing:

In Christian antiquity, the teaching office was the bishop's. Thus the title "Father" was first applied to him. Doctrinal issues in the fourth century brought about further development. The use of the term "Father" became more comprehensive; it was now extended to ecclesiastical writers in so far as they were accepted as representatives of the tradition of the church... We are accustomed to call the authors of early Christian writings "Fathers of the Church" [because in] ancient times the word "Father" was applied to a teacher; for in biblical and early Christian usage, teachers are the fathers of their students.⁵⁹

G. W. Bromiley agrees with Quasten's observations stating succinctly, "Ecclesiastically, the fathers are those who have preceded us in faith and are thus able to instruct us in it."⁶⁰

Towards a summation of these sentiments Bryan Litfin describes the philosophical tradition that undergirds the use of the father metaphor by the early church in pastoral

Roberts & James Donaldson (Peabody, MA; Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1995), 299.

⁵⁶ Ignatius, *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, 12.2 in *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. Michael Holmes (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999), 237.

⁵⁷ Eusebius, *Church History*, 5.4.2, 6.149.9 in *The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus*, trans. Christian Frederick Cruse (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1994), 183.

⁵⁸ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 33.5* in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol.7, ed. Phillip Schaff & Henry Wace (Peabody, MA; Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1995), 279.

⁵⁹ Johannes Quasten, *Patrology: Volume I: The Beginnings of Patristic Literature from the Apostles Creed to Irenaeus*. Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., Editor (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, Ave Maria Press, 1949), 9.

⁶⁰ G. W. Bromiley, "Fathers, Church" in Walter Elwell, *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Baker Book House Company, 2001), 440.

leadership this way:

A father is by definition someone who came before us. A father's children are genetically linked to him as descendants. No matter what our actual human fathers may have been like, most of us can grasp the concept of an ideal father figure. He is the man, who having walked the path of life already, guides his children in wisdom...The fathers are a previous generation of believers who continue to guide their spiritual descendants in the Christian church today.⁶¹

Furthermore, it is of particular importance to note the fact that the Apostolic Fathers received their titles based equally on their character as they did on their intellect and position. This point further amplifies the notion that while Christianity was certainly shaped by the culture in which it was birthed, the metaphors it chose to employ were also dissimilar in many ways to the popular use of the time. While in Greek and Jewish cultures the father metaphor largely represented authority, the Christian movement adopted a more holistic perspective in which a father was not only the one in power, but also one who exercised that power with great care. Indeed, among the commonly agreed upon four-fold criteria for inclusion among the Apostolic Fathers one's writing must not only be orthodox but an individual contributor must also demonstrate "holiness of life."⁶²

From here history fails to demonstrate how the use of the term father grew in application throughout church history. So commonly understood was the association between leaders and fathers that the metaphor gained an increasing foothold in ecclesiastical language until its use was made official by the Roman Catholic Church. As was noted earlier in this work, it is not my intent to evaluate the merits of this practice in particular, however it is instructive to the cause of this work to point out that from a

⁶¹ Bryan Litfin, *Getting to Know the Church Fathers: An Evangelical Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 16-17.

⁶² Bromiley, "Fathers, Church" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 440. The two additional criteria that were necessary for inclusion were antiquity and widespread approval.

scholarly perspective one needs to admit that the current controversies surrounding the use of paternal imagery were either non-existent in the early Church, or contend that all relevant literature on the topic has been lost.

In contrast to either explanation, one of the most logical rationales given for the rise of the official use of the father title for pastoral ministry is not the absence of disdain, but rather the close association of the Greek words for church leadership found in the New Testament; *πρεσβυτέρου* (lit: “elder”) and *ἐπισκοπή* (lit: “bishop”) and their Old Testament counterpart of the position of the “priest” (Heb: כֹּהֵן). Since the Old Testament priests were referred to as “spiritual fathers” for centuries it is less than far-fetched to discern that, instead of masterminding a new hierarchal organizational structure, leaders in the earliest years of the Christian movement simply recognized the logic of continuing to refer to religious leaders with metaphors and images that were fitting and familiar and to their new converts. Due to the sheer absence of written evidence to support or refute this claim explicitly one is left to examine the historical picture in order to determine the motives of the leaders of the early church in choosing to employ paternal language in reference to their spiritual guides. Yet, given the evidence garnered from the cultural and historical traditions from which the church was birthed, one certainly finds sufficient support to suggest that malevolent intentions are not the only motivations to be considered legitimate when discerning the early Church’s adoption of the term for its founders and leaders.

In this section we have seen that the Jewish father was a present father with obligations to create, nurture, train and discipline his children. Implicitly and explicitly, the father was the source of a child’s life and their communal and individual identity. In

addition fathers played a key role in the giving of instruction and served as models in regards to their children's lives from creation to death.

Similarly, we saw that within the Greco-Roman society fathers were the possessors of ultimate power. Most clearly demonstrated in the law of *patria-potestas*, fathers held an unparalleled position in society by which they had virtually absolute authority over every aspect of their family member's lives from conception until death. Like their biological counterparts, the Apostolic Fathers too served the church in a similar fashion by continually defining an orthodox identity for converts, providing doctrinal teaching and instructing the churches in faith, and serving as holy models for followers to imitate.

Finally, given the fact that in Mediterranean cultures a father's most prominent role was to grant life and to serve as the source or the one from whom the blood-line passes, it should not be strange to find the early church adopting this name for apostles and teachers who are the means to entering the family of God. In a very real sense they were the ones who "pass" the blood-line from Christ to a new generation of his children. Through baptism of new converts they regularly participated in the re-birth of converts who join a new family fathered by the local pastor/preacher through which they were saved.

Performing the duties of Old Testament priests and New Testament elders and bishops, the American pastors in the twenty-first century find themselves functioning within a tradition that recognizes their unique role as one that is inherently "fatherly" in nature. As the leader for whom the ultimate responsibility of God's family rests, pastors today shoulder obligations not all that dissimilar to those of fathers in Israel, first century

Rome, the earliest centuries of the Church, or modern day America. Given such realities, the historical and cultural perspectives elaborated above only point more definitively towards the continued application of a powerful metaphor that has served the Church since its inception.

God as Father

In addition to the value of exploring the father metaphor from a historical and cultural context, it is also vitally necessary to investigate the metaphor through a biblical and theological lens, beginning with the use of father as a divine title for the God whom pastors serve. While this thesis is not intended to serve as a full exploration of the father title for God, any attempt to rediscover the term for pastoral use would be incomplete without a brief discussion of the manner in which the paternal metaphor has been consistently employed as a primary means of describing the divine in general, and the Judeo-Christian God specifically for millennia.

Two contrasting perspectives currently shape the ongoing debate regarding the use of paternal imagery for God. On the one hand some argue that the term father is a human term and, as such, is culturally bound and open to revision. Proponents of this perspective argue that present-day analogies to modern fatherhood obscure the original intent and prohibit an accurate employment of the title in this current age.⁶³ Furthermore feminists argue that “Language about the father in heaven who rules over the world justify, and even necessitates an order whereby the male religious leader rules over the flock.”⁶⁴ Or, as Mary Daly puts it bluntly, “If God is male, than male is God.”⁶⁵

⁶³ Christopher R. Seitz “The Divine Name in Christian Scripture” in *This is My Name Forever*, ed. Alvin F. Kimel, Jr. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity press, 2001), 24.

⁶⁴ Elizabeth Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New

The opposing alternative is described by Janet Soskice who observed that any attempts to “replace the Christian language of ‘God as father,’ would result in the institution of a new religion, [because] the language of ‘fatherhood’ is too deeply rooted in the Christian texts and the religion itself, too intimately tied to those texts.”⁶⁶ Therefore, scholars who defend the father metaphor for God do so based solely on exegetical, biblical support. On these grounds scholars suggest we call God Father because it is “the name God responds to” regardless of our personal views on human fathering.⁶⁷

In light of these opposing views it is necessary to highlight two additional points here at the outset which can further clarify the nature of this discussion. First, to say that God is *father* is not to say that God is *male*. Theologians have consistently agreed for millennia that the Trinitarian God of Christianity is personal, and yet, without gender. According to the Westminster Confession of Faith God is “a completely pure spirit, invisible, without body [or] parts.”⁶⁸ Indeed, “Sexuality is an attribute of the created order, which cannot be assumed to correspond directly to any such polarity within the creator God.”⁶⁹

While it is certain to even casual observers of the biblical text that male language for God dominates the landscape of both the Old and New Testaments, numerical volume

York: Crossroad, 1992), 36.

⁶⁵ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 19.

⁶⁶ Janet Martin Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 73.

⁶⁷ Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 24-25.

⁶⁸ *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 2.1.

⁶⁹ Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell publishers, Inc., 2001), 266. McGrath further notes that Israel’s intentional refusal to grant God a gender served as a major departure from the pagan religions that surrounded them.

does not justify the bestowing of human sexuality on a spirit God. As the opening chapters of the book of Genesis declare unequivocally males and females share in the *imago dei* which necessitates a Creator inherently endowed with both male and female qualities, yet remains distinct from both. As Soskice writes, “God is not a human being, and *a fortiori* not a male human being. God is not male, and God is not literally ‘Father’.”⁷⁰

Soskice’s statement raises a second issue of equal importance which needs to be addressed. In the same way that the fatherhood of God does not support a particular gender for God, one also needs to guard against the temptation to confuse the literal use of the term father with the metaphorical. To suggest that God is a father is to say that God is *like* a father in many respects. A healthy perspective will keep in mind that there are boundaries which need to be placed on theological terms which remind one that while God chooses to reveal himself by associations with human models, he maintains distinctions from those models in many respects as well. As Alister McGrath writes:

Divine self-revelation makes use of images and ideas which tie in with our world of everyday existence, yet which do not reduce God to that everyday world. To say that ‘God is our father’ is not to say that God is just another human father...Rather it is to say that thinking about human fathers helps us think about God. They are analogies. Like all analogies, they break down at points. However, they are still extremely useful and vivid ways of thinking about God, which allows us to use the vocabulary and images of our own world to describe something that ultimately lies beyond it.⁷¹

D.A. Carson reiterates the point further by stating, “Our heavenly father is utterly perfect. But even those of us with excellent earthly fathers would not call them perfect. The parallels must be drawn carefully. God has incommunicable attributes that cannot be

⁷⁰ Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 69.

⁷¹ McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 253.

shared by earthly fathers. He is omnipotent and omniscient, attributes which men cannot possess.”⁷² In fact, Kenneth Bailey warns that confusing the difference between earthly fathers and our heavenly one is to run the risk of idolatry.⁷³

Admittedly, “There is a large variety in our experience of earthly fathers. Some have been kind and warm, some others gruff and abusive. Some have been spiritual leaders, others have surrendered that role to the mother. Some have known their fathers all their lives. Others have never known their fathers.”⁷⁴ In light of such truths the church has persisted in its employment of paternal imagery for God despite the fact that the word “father” could not be any more easily separated from its cultural and historical overtones for the early church than for us today. Indeed even a brief glance at the biblical record depicts the continual and perpetual failure of fathers at nearly every turn. God certainly did not choose the metaphor for himself due to the sheer volume of exquisite earthly examples.

However, what is equally certain is the fact that earthly realities always exist as mere shadows and forms that serve as signposts pointing to the existence of perfect heavenly counterparts. This reality is as true to fatherhood as it is to our attempts to construct tabernacles that mirror the throne room of heaven. In light of this, one needs to guard against the constant temptation of reversing the order; instead of using God as the measuring rod for our earthly experience, we allow our earthly experience to define Him.

The Biblical witness is one that regularly points us back to the ideal, God’s

⁷² D.A Carson, “The Pastor as Son of an Earthly Father,” February 5, 2008.

⁷³ Kenneth Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 99.

⁷⁴ D.A Carson, “The Pastor as Son of an Earthly Father,” February 5, 2008.

original plan that was marred by sin and the fall in the Garden. The failure of earthly fathers should not mitigate our use of the title for God but instead it should be the catalyst for our ongoing gratitude that our search for a perfect father is not in vain, one does exist. Overshadowing the finite abilities of earthly fathers “is the image of a heavenly Father who deals with his human children as human fathers were created to do.”⁷⁵ The 1994 Catechism of the Catholic Church expounds on this very notion:

By calling God “Father,” the language of faith indicates two main things: that God is the first origin of everything and transcendent authority; and that he is at the same time goodness and loving care for all his children. The language of faith thus draws on the human experience of parents, who are in a way the first representatives of God for man. But this experience also tells us that human parents are fallible and can disfigure the face of fatherhood and motherhood. We ought therefore to recall that God transcends the human distinction between the sexes. He is neither man nor woman: he is God. He also transcends human fatherhood and motherhood, although he is their origin and standard: no one is father as God is Father.⁷⁶

The father that many people are searching for most certainly exists, and I believe it is from this heavenly ideal that the earliest leaders of the church drew their own metaphor. Certainly they had experienced firsthand how fallible and failure prone their own human fathers were, and yet they persisted in the application of a metaphor that the God who created, rescued, nurtured and disciplined them chose for himself. By doing so they appeared to understand the deep truth that “in biblical writing, naming God ‘Father’ is an anticipation of great intimacy, new relation, of hope, and of love.”⁷⁷ With these introductory observations in place, what follows then is a brief examination of the term father applied to God in both the Old and new Testaments with an aim of tracing the

⁷⁵ “Father, Fatherhood” in the *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, ed. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman, III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 273.

⁷⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994), 2.2239.

⁷⁷ Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 66.

historical roots of this religious metaphor that lends credibility to the continued employment of paternal imagery in pastoral ministry today.

God as Father in the Old Testament

Paternal imagery has served as a foundational description of deity since the earliest recorded history of world civilizations. As the famous German scholar Joachim Jeremias has stated, “From the earliest time, the Near East has been familiar with the mythological idea that the deity is the father of mankind or of certain human beings.”⁷⁸ The nation of Israel was no different in this regard referring to God throughout the Old Testament as a “God without superior, without peer, without parentage or external origin, without a consort, without offspring... [and] unambiguously ‘he.’”⁷⁹

Throughout the Old Testament God is referred to as “father” eleven times.⁸⁰ Of these instances the term father is never used as a direct address to God, but instead it is always used to describe what God is like.⁸¹ Most predominantly God’s role as a father is tied to his acts of creation of the natural world (Gen 1:1 ff), the nation of Israel (Exod 4:22), and the establishment of the Davidic Kingdom (Ps 2:7).

Frequently God’s act of creation is closely aligned with his role as a rescuer and protector of his people. In reference to the great Exodus, God repeatedly calls Israel to remember the days that he called them out of Egypt as a beloved child (Hos 11:1), and

⁷⁸ Joachim Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1965), 9.

⁷⁹ Paul Mankowski, “The Gender of Israel’s God” in *This is My Name Forever*, ed. Alvin F. Kimel, Jr. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity press, 2001), 35. In this same essay Mankowski presents extensive grammatical support for his claim by presenting the unique rules that govern Semitic languages, and the consistent use of masculine verbs as descriptors of the actions of YHWH (cf. 36ff).

⁸⁰ Robert Hammerton-Kelly, “God the Father in the Bible and in the Experience of Jesus: The State of the Question,” in Metz *et al* (eds.), *God as Father?* (New York: Seabury Press, 1981), 96.

⁸¹ Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 97.

the years he carried them through the wilderness “as a man carries his son” (Deut 1:31).

Later the Psalmist will echo this theme noting “You are my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation.”

Secondly, the unique relationship with the divine was marked not only by obligations on the part of the follower, but obligations for the Creator as well. As the father of his people God not only served as their originator, but also as their means of ongoing nurturing and instruction. As the one who has fashioned and knows the “frame” of his children, God is also full of fatherly indulgence for their weaknesses.⁸² The Psalmist writes, “As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him (Ps 103:13). And through the prophet Malachi God states, “They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him” (Mal 3:17).

Thirdly, the fatherhood of God serves as the basis for his loving discipline (Deut 8:5). When God reproaches the nation of Israel in the book of Malachi he thunders, “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name” (Mal 1:6). Similarly, when speaking of King David, God declares, “I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will correct him with the rod of men and the strokes of the sons of men” (2 Sam 7:14; 1 Chron 17:13).

Finally, God’s role as a father to Israel is intimately tied to the granting of identity. Despite the fact that the majority of Near-Eastern religions believed in divine

⁸² Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament*, 11.

paternity, Israel's use of the father title for God was unique in that it contrasted dominant themes in Ancient Near-Eastern creation myths where gods are portrayed explicitly as *literal*, biological fathers. The distinction is significant in that it highlights the unique nature of the paternal relationship between YHWH and his people. "The God of Israel is defined, then, over and against father gods, gods who beget the world, and paradoxically, it is this abolition of the biological father god that makes non-idolatrous, metaphorical 'father language' about God possible."⁸³

The God of Abraham, Moses and the prophets is a God whose primary relationship with his people is one of creation and adoption made possible through the work of God's Word. In the Old Testament God does not become one's father by natural birth but through the divine acts of calling and election. A child of God becomes such through the gracious act of adoption by which God not only creates, but also restores and claims. The children of God are more than just his creation they are his "treasured possession" (Exod 19:3). Consequently, God is not father to the entire world, but to those who are in faithful relationship with him marked by devotion and fear (Ps 103:13). A relationship that sets them apart, granting them identity as members of God's household (Eph 2:19).

God as Father in the New Testament

Similar to the evidence examined throughout the Old Testament, the Greek word *theos* is used consistently for God in the New Testament in conjunction with a majority of analogies including "king," "shepherd" and Jesus' unanimously employed term, "father." Likewise, the actions and implications of his title are consistent across both testaments including his role as creator and sustainer of his people. In the New Testament

⁸³ Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 76.

God is described as a father who faithfully provides everything that his children not only need (Matt 6:25-34), but also gifts as well (Luke 11:11-13). He is a faithful father to those without one (Jam 1:27) and is the one who feeds his children “true bread” (John 6:32) and offers discipline when necessary (Heb. 12:5).

However it is the incarnation of Jesus Christ that illuminates fully the father metaphor for God in the New Testament. In the Gospels alone Jesus refers to God directly as father no less than 170 times, and *never* invokes him by any other name in his prayers.⁸⁴ In doing so it is Jesus that most radically changes the use of the father metaphor for God by referring to him as his personal father and challenging the unbroken tradition of referring to God exclusively in communal terms, as the father of the entire community.⁸⁵

What is more unique to this point is that when Jesus speaks to God he employs the far more informal, familiar term, “*Abba*,” a form of invocation towards God that is without parallel anywhere in Jewish literature.⁸⁶ By doing so Jesus presents a radically new lens through which the brothers and sisters of a new spiritual family can now interact with the God of their fathers. According to Jesus, YHWH is a heavenly father whose immanence is equal to his transcendence; a heavenly father who is responsive to the prayers and requests of his children (Luke 11:2-4), and a father who has prepared an eternal dwelling for his followers (John 14:6).

Perhaps most poignant is the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) through

⁸⁴ Robert Hamerton-Kelly, *God the Father: Theology and Patriarchy in the teaching of Jesus* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1979), 20.

⁸⁵ Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament*, 15-17.

⁸⁶ Jeremias, *The Central Message of the New Testament*, 19.

which Jesus paints a picture of God as a father abounding with love and grace towards his wayward children. Having squandered his inheritance on sinful living, a humiliated son returns home to find a father racing towards him with arms wide open, an extravagant feast, and unconditional forgiveness. To an audience which refused to even speak the name of their God audibly, Jesus' tale was scandalous. In his radical parable Jesus "was not describing fathers as he knew them but rather creating a new image that he intended to use as a model for God."⁸⁷

Part of this image that Jesus presents to us in the Gospels is a further elaboration of the principle of spiritual adoption highlighted earlier. Consistently the biblical authors reveal that it is only through Jesus Christ, the true Son of God, that God's people join his family and are brought into a new relationship with their God. As stated earlier, God is not "Our Father" by birth, but by *re*-birth. In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus rebukes the religious leaders for their presumptions that ancestral lineage secures their relationship with God (Matt 3:9). Instead, Jesus affirms that God's title as father is not a universal one which can be employed by all, but only by those in whom the Spirit resides, the spirit which invites God's children to refer to "I AM" as "Abba." (Rom 8:15). James Orr summarizes this final point by writing:

Man as created was designed by affinity of nature for sonship to God. The realization of this- his true creature-destiny-was frustrated by sin, and can now only be restored by redemption. Hence, the place of sonship in the gospel, as an unspeakable privilege (1 Jn 3:1), is obtained by grace, through regeneration (Jn 1:12,13), and adoption (Rom 8:14,19). In this relation of nearness and privilege to the Father in the kingdom of His Son (Col 1:13), believers are "sons of God" in a sense true of no others. It is a relation, not of nature, but of grace.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes*, 99.

⁸⁸ James Orr "Father, God the" in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (electronic edition), James Orr, general editor (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1939).

Jesus' Use of the father Metaphor and Matthew 23:8-11

Despite the clarity Jesus brought to the understanding of God as a father, he also introduced a fair amount of ambiguity in the area of pastoral leadership. Among the biblical texts that deal explicitly with the title of father as it relates to leadership, few have gained as much attention as Jesus' pointed exhortation in Matthew 23:9 to "call no man father." Viewed by some as Jesus' attempt to "undermine the authority and social cohesiveness of the blood kin group patriarchal family,"⁸⁹ the proper exegesis of Jesus' command is of vital importance to the nature of pastoral ministry. Nestled among criticism of church leadership, Jesus' words present the church with the necessary task of discerning to what degree, and in what manner, pastors pursue and officiate their call as leaders of their congregations. Specifically, are Jesus' words a complete refutation of honorific titles among his followers? If so, do his words exclude the metaphorical use of those titles as well?

The immediate context of Jesus' discourse on leadership falls amidst an explicitly public shaming of the Scribes and Pharisees, whom Jesus accuses of being hypocrites that fail to model the ideals they espouse, oppressive leaders who make the law a burden and reduce religion to a public spectacle of vanity and showmanship. Despite the fact that in the previous section of scripture Jesus urged his disciples to "do and observe" all that the Scribes and Pharisees instruct them to do (v. 3), Jesus is now quick to unveil a distinction between obeying what religious leaders say, and imitating their lives. As Craig Keener notes, "Jesus agrees that many of the ethical teachings of the scribes and Pharisees are

⁸⁹ Scott Bartchy, "Undermining Ancient Patriarchy," 69.

good; the problem is not their teaching but their behavior.”⁹⁰

This important observation erects a necessary framework from which to begin working through a text in which Jesus delivers a denunciation of the use of honorific titles for those in leadership. It is ultimately this charge of self-promotion that thematically ties together this pericope as Jesus warns his disciples that their own view of leadership should be one that stands in stark contrast to the prevalent *modus operandi* of the religious leaders of the day. While Jesus forbids a number of titles including Rabbi, leader, and teacher, the central emphasis of this work is Jesus’ prohibition of the use of the term “father.”

Contextually, Jesus is teaching a crowd that includes religious leaders, the general public and his disciples who have gathered outside in the temple courtyard (Matt 24:1). Speaking first to the general public with warnings about their corrupt religious guides, Jesus directs his attention specifically to his disciples in 23: 8-12. As Donald Senior states, “The fact that this is addressed to the disciples is an important clue about the ultimate purpose of this speech. While obviously intended as a critique of the scribes and Pharisees, it is primarily intended as instruction for the followers of Jesus.”⁹¹ Jesus highlights the self-interests of the leaders of the religious establishment in order to identify them as poor examples whose primary service to the followers of Jesus is to serve as a foil from which to expand on his own vision of true leadership.

This perspective is expanded further by Anthony Saldarini who ties the exhortation more closely to the immediate context by arguing that Jesus is not

⁹⁰ Craig Keneer, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 540.

⁹¹ Donald Senior, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 157.

denouncing the use of all honorific titles, but those employed specifically by the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day⁹² in order that his own disciples may be distinguished more fully from Israel's "blind guides." He writes:

The intent of Matthew is clear: because the members of his group have been authorized by God and instructed by Jesus and thus have the true interpretation of Scripture and the Jewish tradition, they, not other Jewish teachers, should be listened to. They, not the established rulers, are the legitimate guides of Israel.⁹³

In light of this call to textual clarity, it is essential to note that Jesus' exhortation should not be viewed as a wholesale denial of the *use* of honorific titles, but rather the *pursuit* of those titles by his followers.⁹⁴ Jesus' criticism is not intended to undermine the actual role of the Scribes and Pharisees or the offices they hold, but the way in which they fulfill their duties, and their motivation for pursuing the office.⁹⁵ Jesus is pointing out the glaring inconsistency in the hearts of religious leaders who have been called to serve, but abuse that calling as a means to bring themselves honor, and it is precisely Jesus' emphasis on *honor* here that brings the father title the majority of attention in religious scholarship. As Phillip Wendell Crannell writes, "Christ's condemnation is clearly of the praise-seeking or obsequious spirit, rather than of a particular custom."⁹⁶

⁹² K. Kohler, "Abba, Father Title of Spiritual Leader and Saint," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol., No. 14 (July, 1901), 567.

⁹³ Anthony J. Saldarini, "Delegitimization of leaders in Matthew 23," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Oct92, Vol. 54, Issue 4, 659-80. While I do support Saldarini's final exegesis, his statements further emphasize the importance of rooting this conversation in historical context. While his statements run the risk of detaching Christ's warning from timeless application, they can be a useful reminder that removing the command from its historical context entirely is equally poor exegesis.

⁹⁴ This insight is often overlooked by a number of scholars, including Joseph Hellerman, who ironically denounce the "father" title while continuing to enjoy the title of "teacher" in the academy.

⁹⁵ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, TNICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2007), 858.

⁹⁶ Philip Wendell Crannell, "Father" in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (electronic edition), James Orr, general editor (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1939).

While the titles of Rabbi and teacher had fairly straightforward definitions in biblical times (as they do today), the title father was a fairly nuanced term employed in a number of sociological settings including domestic, academic and religious spheres. In addition to the literal, familial use of the word, “father” was also an honorific title for teachers or masters as well as spiritual guides.⁹⁷ Due to the fact that elsewhere Jesus specifically demands honor for earthly fathers (Matt 15:5; 19:19) there is widespread support that Jesus is concerned solely here with non-familial leadership.⁹⁸

The immediate context lends support to this argument as Jesus clearly links the father term here with the titles of Rabbi and teacher and nowhere in the pericope discusses kinship relations. With that said, Jesus’ statements cannot be easily dismissed as it relates to church leadership. As Donald Senior writes, “Jesus presents an alternative vision for the community [where] titles of honor and status within the community are nullified by the realization that only God and God’s Messiah hold such authority.”⁹⁹ The religious leaders of Jesus’ day enjoyed a particular status as the final authority on the practice of religion and here Jesus draws clear parameters around their office by situating his followers under the authority of their heavenly father, submitting humbly as teachers and guides who sit under The Teacher.

Given the previous critique of religious leaders who “do their deeds to be seen by others” (v. 5) and seek “the best seats in the synagogue” (v. 6), Jesus’ prohibition against

⁹⁷ For a complete discussion on this topic see chapter 2 of this thesis which deals with the historical roots of the father metaphor in Jewish culture.

⁹⁸ Cf. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 577; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on his Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), 458-9; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text, NIGTC* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 928. Hellerman disagrees and argues that Jesus’ intent was to establish a community of siblings without earthly fathers, see Hellerman, *Ancient Church as Family*, 101.

⁹⁹ Senior, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 157.

the use of honorific titles highlights his emphasis on issues of heart and motivation rather than his abhorrence for the titles themselves. As they do in our own day, official titles served as clear lines of demarcation for official offices. Judges, emperors, princes, senators and generals bore titles that signified not only their status, but their responsibilities as well. Today if someone falls ill they search for a *doctor* of medicine not a *teacher* of medicine and the distinction in title serves as a lifesaving signpost to the public world. As such, it is absurd to assume Jesus had any serious contempt for something as morally neutral as a professional title.

Nevertheless, Jesus is emphatically opposed to the pursuit of titles for titles' sake. To clarify, Jesus does not endorse here the pursuit of the title without any regard for the responsibilities of the office they represent, and, most importantly, to whom these professionals ultimately answer to. "Christians have but one teacher, and they must not expect that in due course others will emerge who will eclipse him and establish their own ways of understanding what God wills for his people. There is and can only be one Jesus."¹⁰⁰

Senior's observation highlights the weight of Jesus' command for his followers and also raises a crucial point in regards to a proper interpretation of Jesus' teaching here in the Gospel of Matthew. Faithful exegetes of Scripture must constantly take into account the varied means that Jesus employed when teaching the masses in pursuit of an appropriate application for his words. In addition to metaphor, parable and sarcasm, Jesus also frequently chose to speak through hyperbole. According to William Harper, "Hyperbole is a rhetorical device for producing emphasis; it is a figure of speech in

¹⁰⁰ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 576.

which one says more than is meant, or states unconditionally what must in use be conditioned, for the purpose of stirring effect.”¹⁰¹ Evidence of this practice is found in Jesus’ shocking exhortation, “If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell (Matt 5:29).

Undoubtedly, the key question when approaching the topic of hyperbole in the teaching of Jesus is “how do we know when he is using it?” Or, to put it another way, how does the Church safeguard from watering all that Jesus has taught by referring to it as mere hyperbole? One means of differentiating between what teachings Jesus intended as literal and which he intended figuratively is to evaluate them in light of what Jesus spoke about clearly. When one takes the time to do so one can quickly surmise that while Jesus spoke frequently about his followers assuming a posture of service and humility, nowhere else does he condemn the use of particular titles. Such an observation allows for one to reasonably assume that when Jesus commands his followers to “call no man father” he is using hyperbole as an effective teaching tool that warns them sternly about their need to guard themselves fully from the lure of abusive power and the pursuit of positions of honor instead of striving to be servants marked by humility.

With this in view it remains essential to point out the wide difference between the *literal* use of the title “father” and a *metaphorical* application of the title in pastoral ministry. It seems of utter importance to note that nowhere in this text does Jesus state, implicitly or explicitly, that followers should not *think* of their leaders as fathers, or that leaders should not conduct themselves as fathers to their congregations. Leon Morris

¹⁰¹ William Harper, “Jesus’ Use of Hyperbole”, *The Biblical Word*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1902), 6.

observes, “There is, of course, a sense in which a Christian may be spoken of as ‘father’ to other believers, but in the New Testament the term is not used *as a title*, nor is it to be employed with any sense of superiority.”¹⁰² Indeed, Morris here hits upon a central aspect of Jesus’ words which is often overlooked in contemporary scholarship, namely that Jesus is speaking explicitly about the overt use of literal, honorific titles in the office of religious leadership¹⁰³ rendering its applicability to a discussion of the value of the terms *metaphorical use* as doubtful. As Frederick Bruner points out, “Jesus does not command, ‘Don’t ever *be* a teacher or doctor...But Jesus does command that his teachers not be *called* by honorific titles.”¹⁰⁴

By definition metaphors expand definitions while offering additional lenses through which to view the world. They are employed when a name alone fails to encapsulate the totality of a particular object or position. The multifaceted aspects of pastoral ministry demand a myriad of images to adequately nuance the gravity of the responsibility given to those who have been called by God to lead his people. While the term “father” may be considered wrought with cultural and ecclesiastical baggage by some, the terms “pastor,” “priest,” or “minister” have no fewer issues. Since its inception, the church has relied on metaphors to capture the essence of spiritual realities in earthly terms. Speaking of God as a gardener, the Church as a bride, disciples as branches, Christ

¹⁰² Morris, 577 (emphasis mine).

¹⁰³ While it is not the primary focus of this work, some scholars suggest that this text offers a strong warning against the continuation of the official title held by clergy in the Roman Catholic Church (and, to a lesser extent, in the Anglican tradition as well). As Frederick Bruner states, “Jesus’ critique of teaching titles in v. 8 forces especially Protestant Christians to rethink their language and practice; Jesus’ critique of devotional titles obliges especially Catholic and Orthodox Christians to reconsider their traditions.” Frederick Bruner, *The Churchbook: Matthew 13-28* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 439.

¹⁰⁴ Bruner, *The Churchbook*, 437 (emphasis original).

as a lamb, and pastors as shepherds has fostered the ability of mortal, finite beings to increasingly grasp the depth of things eternal.

In a context where Jesus is clearly speaking of the bestowing of literal, honorary titles, it seems less than necessary, even unwise, to push his prohibition into the realm of metaphorical speech as well. The prevailing argument in opposition of the father metaphor supposes that if one *thinks* of himself as a father that he will inherently consider those under their care as servants to their egos and agendas. Here in the text Jesus is specifically denouncing such a perspective on leadership by consistently urging his own disciples to handle themselves in a starkly contrasting manner, to lead as a follower of the Leader, to lead as a servant and to forsake the pursuit of honor of self against the pursuit of honor of the One they serve. While some may find here a veiled attempt to promote the hierarchal structures of the modern church, I am, in actuality, attempting to draw attention to the implicit nature of leadership in God's kingdom where the followers of Jesus are consistently called to fulfill the role of both the leader and the follower, shepherd and sheep, manager and slave, father and child.

Herein lies what I consider to be the primary error in modern scholarship regarding pastoral leadership. All too often scholars from opposing camps swing the proverbial pendulum between the two (apparently) contrasting roles of leader and follower without noticing that *both* responsibilities are laid on the shoulders of those in Jesus' new community. As David Bennett asserts, "Jesus was not establishing a kind of radical egalitarianism where any sort of internal authority structure in the community was seen as a denial of brotherhood, or where any difference in level of responsibility was

seen as an attack on the spiritual equality.”¹⁰⁵ By referencing such parables as the minas and the talents (Luke 19:12-27) in addition to Jesus’ references to the authoritative offices of judges (Matt 19:28), shepherds (John 21) and managers (Luke 12), Bennett reestablishes our focus on Jesus’ true vision of a community of men and women who would serve Him, and one another, through a variety of roles, including roles that distributed authority and key responsibilities to specific members of the community.¹⁰⁶

The means of understanding this apparent dichotomy is to recognize the biblical concept of stewardship. While disciples are given authority within the community it is authority borrowed and bestowed from the one who has been given “all authority on heaven and earth” (Matt 28:13). Likewise, any sense of responsibility given to a leader in the church is not ultimate responsibility but responsibility of a possession that is not one’s own. Pastors are managers over their master’s household (1 Tim 3:5), shepherds (Gk. *poimen*) of another’s flock (John 10:2), and fathers of another’s children (1 Cor 4:16).¹⁰⁷ It is in light of such a perspective that one can more accurately exegete the statements of the Apostle Paul when he speaks of himself as a “father” to God’s children. Far from contradicting Jesus’ statements recorded in Matthew’s gospel, Paul is one who has firmly grasped the dual nature of membership in Jesus’ new community.

Paul’s Use of the Father Metaphor

Given the evidence provided in the historical section of this thesis, Paul’s use of the father metaphor has been largely debated in regards to which historical context it was taken, either the Jewish context of his religious instruction and ethnicity, or the Roman

¹⁰⁵ David W. Bennett, *Metaphors of Ministry*, 64.

¹⁰⁶ Bennett, *Metaphors of Ministry*, 64.

¹⁰⁷ Bennett, *Metaphors of Ministry*, 71.

one of his citizenship. As was noted earlier in this work, while the Jewish and Roman cultures shared many similarities in regards to the role of fathers, numerous dissimilarities were also highlighted. With this in view it is important to disclose that in evaluating the evidence this author sides with those who posit that Paul's use of the father metaphor was shaped more profoundly by Judaism than his Greco-Roman surroundings. At the outset of an examination of Paul's use of the father metaphor I echo the sentiments of Anthony Myrick who writes:

We do not deny that there is congruity between Paul, moral philosophy and the Roman tradition, but seek to stress the likelihood that Paul received his pastoral paternal imagery from his Jewish heritage, where pastoral leaders were depicted in terms of a father whose care for his children includes correction. Paul's debt to the Old Testament imagery of fatherhood, which influenced Early Judaism, seems to be more significant than has often been recognized.¹⁰⁸

Furthermore, it should also be asked whether or not Paul's use of the father metaphor justifies the use of it by other pastors. Another way of asking the question is to discern whether Paul's role was primarily apostolic or pastoral. Does Paul serve the church as a "model pastor" or as a leader who was entirely unique within church history? In writing to the pastors of his newly founded churches some might suggest that Paul's use of self-referential language does not transfer equally to the pastors he was developing. The reality, however, is that Paul does not ever implicitly, or explicitly, state one way or the other. Paul was a pastor *and* an apostle, pastoring as well as planting churches among the gentiles. Therefore his letters represent not only his ongoing pastoral care, but also serve as a guide to young pastors. Indeed, this idea is found at the heart of each of the passages in which the father metaphor is used. In his letter to the church of

¹⁰⁸ Anthony A. Myrick, "Father Imagery in 2 Corinthians 1-9 and Jewish Paternal Tradition," *Tyndale Bulletin* 47.1 (May, 1996) 170-171.

Corinth Paul exhorts his followers to “be imitators” of him and again in his letter to Thessalonica he commends his congregation for becoming “imitators.” Towards this end, one can understand Paul as both a unique apostle as well as a model pastor whose interaction with his congregation can rightfully serve as a guide for future pastors.

In particular for this thesis, I have chosen to focus my attention on just two passages from Paul’s writings, 1 Corinthians 4:14-16 and 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12. My justification for doing so is twofold. First, and perhaps most obviously, these two passages contain the two explicit uses of the father metaphor in Paul’s writing. As such they serve as important windows into the pastoral theology of Paul in regards to the father metaphor and a mandatory starting place of any discussion on the father metaphor in pastoral ministry. Secondly, while Paul implicitly employed the father metaphor by referring to congregants and leaders as “children,” “little children,” and “sons,” it is my conviction that these secondary metaphors, or supporting metaphors, can only be rightly understood in light of a proper examination of Paul’s use of the father metaphor.

1 Corinthians 4:14-16

Situated along a key trading route between Rome and the east, the city of Corinth was well populated and wealthy, a port associated with culture and prestige.¹⁰⁹ Yet, as was the case with most port cities of the time, rising populations gave way to an increase in immorality. So notorious was the city that the Greeks used its name to refer to anyone who was living a life of debauchery and licentiousness; (Gk. *korinthiazein*).¹¹⁰ This perception was due in no small part to the fact that the city was home to some 1,000

¹⁰⁹ Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, TNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1958), 5.

¹¹⁰ David Prior, *The Message of I Corinthians: Life in the Local Church*, 11.

sacred prostitutes who assisted citizens and tourists in the worship of Aphrodite within her temple situated on a hill above the city called Acrocorinth.¹¹¹

Into this extravagant and decadent environment ventures the Apostle Paul following a meeting with the Jerusalem Council in the autumn of 50 AD.¹¹² His journey to the large city came on the heels of a discouraging season of ministry in the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea and Athens. Being fully aware that the environment of Corinth promised to deliver no fewer hardships, it is understandable that Paul exclaimed that he came to the new port “in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling” (1 Cor 2:3). Paul’s premonition would not fail him as he labored for eighteen months developing the church in Corinth, spending more time in that city than any other besides Ephesus (Acts 18:1-18).

Due to its sheer diversity of members and the competing values of the culture around them, the church in Corinth would prove to be Paul’s most challenging congregation. Simon Kistemaker observes:

There were Jewish Christians who knew the Old Testament Scriptures and gentile God-fearers who attended the worship services in the local synagogue; affluent citizens and poverty-stricken slaves. The congregation included people of various nationalities and many languages. We can safely say that, because of its diversity, the Corinthian church did not excel at stability.¹¹³

In fact, just five brief years after its founding Paul deems it necessary to fashion a

¹¹¹ Prior, *The Message of I Corinthians*, 11

¹¹² Simon J. Kistemaker, *I Corinthians*, NTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993), 9.

¹¹³ Kistemaker, 10. Charles Hodge made a similar point a decade earlier when he wrote, “In all ages the Greeks were distinguished by their fondness for speculation, their vanity, and love of pleasure, and their party spirit. A church composed of people of these characteristics, with a large infusion of Jewish converts, educated in the midst of refined heathenism, surrounded by all the incentives to indulgence, taught to consider pleasure, if not the chief good, yet in any form a good, plied on every hand by philosophers and false teachers, might be expected to exhibit the very characteristics which in this epistle are brought so clearly into view.” Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on I & II Corinthians* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), xii.

letter to his fledgling church¹¹⁴ following three key events. The first was receiving oral reports from the household of Chloe regarding growing contentions in the congregation that threatened unity (1:11). The second was the arrival of a letter from the church asking questions on a variety of issues including, marriage (7:1), food sacrificed to idols (8:1) and spiritual gifts (12:1), and finally, a visit by a delegation from the Corinthian church consisting of Stephanus, Fortunatus and Achaïs (16:17).¹¹⁵

In the first four chapters of the letter to the church in Corinth, Paul deals with issues of division and competition stemming from a community who had fully embraced the values of the culture around them, a proud culture that prioritized status, power and honor as the highest ideals. In Paul's absence from the Corinthian community the church had increasingly succumbed once again to the lure of prestige and worldly wisdom prized by the Greco-Roman world in which they lived. As David Garland asserts, "the implications of this backdrop for understanding the problems that beset the Corinthian church should not be underestimated."¹¹⁶ Garland continues, "Most, if not all, of the problems that Paul addresses were hatched from the influence of this setting (and) values that were antithetical to the cross."¹¹⁷

To realign their perspective, Paul uses the first four chapters of his letter to contrast their explicit attempts to attain standing and reputation with his own calling as an apostle and servant of the church who is "foolish," "weak," "the scum of the world and

¹¹⁴ 1 Corinthians is actually the second letter that Paul's writes to the church. Paul makes reference to the writing of a previous letter (1 Cor. 5:9) which is no longer extant.

¹¹⁵ Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 360.

¹¹⁶ David Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2003), 5.

¹¹⁷ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 5.

the dregs of all things” (1 Cor 4:10-13). Perhaps in an attempt to soften the blow, Paul then employs a number of familial metaphors to implicitly remind the Corinthians that accountability is the loving mandate of every healthy household.

In verse 14 Paul writes, “I do not write these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children.” Having chastised the Corinthian church in the previous chapter for their spiritual immaturity and arrogance (cf. 1 Cor 3:1-3), Paul now reminds his wayward congregation that his true motivation in writing such a letter is not to bring about embarrassment and humiliation, but, ultimately, repentance and redemption. By employing the word shame (Gk. ἐντρέπων) Paul hits upon one of the deepest fears within the Corinthian culture where one’s public status reigns supreme. In such a cultural context Paul does not suggest that the behavior of the Corinthians should not have caused them to be ashamed, he is simply clarifying the intent of his writing. Paul’s aim is not to protect the Corinthians from the burdens of their honor-shame driven society, but rather to redefine their true source of identity.¹¹⁸ While shame is a natural byproduct of sinful behavior, Paul’s emphasis appears to lie on an affirmation of their identity in Christ and the preciousness of their personhood rather than to focus on their outward behavior, which would serve no purpose other than to bring additional shame and guilt.

Indeed, it is possible that Paul wisely discerns that it is actually their sense of shame that is perpetuating an outward craving for validation and an unhealthy clamoring for status within the community.¹¹⁹ The speculation is made even more plausible as Paul counters such false self-impressions with his reference to the Corinthians as his “beloved

¹¹⁸ Anthony Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 369.

¹¹⁹ David Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 145.

children” (Gk. τέκνα μου ἀγαπητά) whom he desires to “admonish” (Gk. νοουθετῶν).

While to a modern, western, audience Paul’s choice of the word “children” may appear to be rather patronizing, the noun is greatly nuanced by the presence of the intimate adjective (Gk. ἀγαπητά). This word is typically rendered as “dearly loved” or “beloved,” and it serves to unveil Paul’s true desire to “instill in them a sense of self-worth that comes from God’s grace and power in their lives, which is able to eradicate any hunger for the mercurial, inconsequential honor bestowed by the world.”¹²⁰ By employing such an intimate and potent familial metaphor, Paul draws on “the basic unit of urban life in the Greco-Roman world”¹²¹ and reiterates their identity as spiritual members of the household of God.

As his children, Paul writes, he is compelled to admonish them. While the word “admonish” (Gk. νοουθετῶ[ν]) carries with it the connotation of a corrective influence, it also implies the kind of compassionate appeal and counsel fitting for the relationship between a father and son, a point further clarified by Paul’s use of the cognate noun in his letter to the Ephesians in describing paternal responsibilities (Eph 6:4). As a caring father, Paul exposes the sins of the Corinthians in order to train and instruct them as a father would a child. Paul’s affection for the community in Corinth is most evident in the fact that his antidote for their sinful behavior is not *necessarily* punishment,¹²² but a reminder of their uniqueness to him as the spiritual family he himself begot, a reminder of their true identity. Far from viewing his pastoral position as one that demands blind

¹²⁰ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 145.

¹²¹ Charles B. Cousar, *The Letters of Paul, IBT* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1997), 6.

¹²² The Apostle Paul is not above such an approach to instruction. At the close of this passage Paul will warn the Corinthians that if they do not heed his correction, stronger discipline may be necessary writing, “What do you desire? Shall I come to you with a rod, or with love and a spirit of gentleness?” (1 Cor. 4:21).

obedience from his parishioners, Paul embraces the paternal metaphor as a means to communicate his intimate relationship with the Corinthians and to emphasize the difficult, but necessary, responsibility he has to lovingly reprove them. Anthony Thiselton writes, “Parental love sometimes entails the unpleasant task of correction for the good of the child, but this is a sign not of indifference, but of concern, care, and responsible love.”¹²³

Paul further iterates his paternal care by continuing to use familiar household terminology in the following verse where he writes, “For if you were to have countless tutors in Christ, yet you would not have many fathers” (v.15). Here Paul employs an additional familial metaphor when he contrasts his own role among the Corinthians to that of a “tutor” (Gk. παιδαγωγός, transliterated, *paidagogos*). In Hellenistic culture a *paidagogos*, often translated as “guardian” or “tutor,” was an older slave in a household who was charged with the task of overseeing the education of a child.¹²⁴ The *paidagogos* was appointed by a child’s father and was responsible for the accompaniment of a child to school each day where the *paidagogos* would assist the child in his or her educational endeavors.¹²⁵ While the *paidagogos* played a significant role in a child’s life, they were often portrayed in art and literature as harsh task-masters who were viewed less than favorably throughout Greco-Roman culture.¹²⁶

Paul utilizes the term “ten thousand” (Gk. μυρίους) as a hyperbolic phrase

¹²³ Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 369.

¹²⁴ Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1987), 185.

¹²⁵ Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, 83.

¹²⁶ For a comprehensive discussion of the role of the *paidagogos* see Norman H. Young “Paidagogos; The Social Setting of the Pauline Metaphor,” *NovT* 29 (1987), 150-176.

contrasting an innumerable number of assistants in the faith to the uniqueness of his own, exclusive role, as the one who has brought them to faith in Christ, their spiritual progenitor. Despite the fact that a *paidagogos* spent significant time with the children under their care, his influence was always subordinate to that of a father who always retained ultimate responsibility for his children's welfare. In the same way, Paul's founding of the church in Corinth places him in a role unique among anyone else who may assist the Corinthians in their spiritual journey, permitting him the opportunity to explicitly assert what he has already said implicitly, "for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel."

Bengt Holmberg asserts that Paul makes reference to his parental role in every one of his letters except the letter to the Romans to "express the fact that he had begotten them or given them life by the transmission of the Gospel of Christ."¹²⁷ Walter Orr and James Walther agree adding, "By establishing the new church in a pagan city the apostle became the father of the believers; he was the only one who could actually claim that relation to them. This fatherly authority gave him the right to instruct them, and it also laid on them an obligation to heed what he said, wrote and did."¹²⁸

As is often the case, those that are suspicious of Paul's motivation for his use of the father metaphor do so under the assumption that Paul's immediate, Greco-Roman context shaped his pastoral theology more than his strict, Jewish upbringing.¹²⁹ However, as Stephen Joubert counters, "although Paul was born in Tarsus, a city renowned as a

¹²⁷ Bengt Holmberg, *Paul and Power: The Structure of Authority in the Primitive Church as Reflected in the Pauline Epistles* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1978), 78.

¹²⁸ William F. Orr and James Arthur Walther, *1 Corinthians: A New Translation, AB* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1976), 182.

¹²⁹ See Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse on Power* (Louisville, TN: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991).

centre of Greco-Roman culture, his own religious socialization took place in a Jewish context. As a devout Pharisee he learnt to organize and classify the world in terms of Jewish views on purity and order.”¹³⁰ While Paul was undoubtedly influenced by his immediate cultural context, the fact that he employs a metaphor that was profoundly and fundamentally shaped in the earliest years of his life should guard interpreters from ignoring Paul’s Jewish understanding of the term, not only in regards to biological fathers, but especially as it related to the relationship between teachers and disciples discussed earlier.

It is quite possible that a Greco-Roman influence can be inferred in regards to the possible authoritative nature of the father metaphor in Paul’s mind. Yet, Joubert suggests that the Apostle Paul’s view on the authorial structure of the church was more influenced by his theological perspective on the cosmic structure of the heavenly *paterfamilias* in which Christ reigns over the entire Universe as God’s first born son, reconciling those who are formerly God’s enemies into his children. Within this framework Paul identifies himself as an official ambassador of the heavenly *paterfamilias* who continues to oversee the reconciliation and ruling of God’s children here on earth.¹³¹

This perspective coincides with Bennett’s statements discussed earlier in which the people of God are called to identify themselves in the roles of both leader and follower simultaneously.¹³² In addition, Paul’s vision for himself is one in which he is not in possession of God’s family but stewarding it on God’s behalf. On the one hand, Paul

¹³⁰ Stephen J. Joubert, “Managing the Household: Paul as *paterfamilias* of the Christian Household group in Corinth” in Phillip Francis Esler, *Modeling early Christianity: Social-Scientific Studies of the New Testament*, (London: Routledge, 1995), 216.

¹³¹ Joubert, “Managing the Household: Paul as *paterfamilias* of the Christian Household Group in Corinth”, 216.

¹³² Joubert, “Managing the Household,” 7-8.

was an apostle appointed by God (1 Cor 1:1) who had seen the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6) through revelation and could “therefore claim the highest rank for himself within the *ekklēsia*; he was subordinate to nobody else” having derived his pastoral authority from ‘outside the community’.”¹³³ On the other hand Paul was also a servant of Christ who considered himself a slave to all men (1 Cor 9:19). In this way Paul engages with the Corinthian community as both a child of God and a leader/father of God’s earthly *paterfamilias*. This paradigm for understanding Paul’s use of the father metaphor is central and corresponds to the leadership model God continually employs throughout the Scriptures.

In the book of Genesis God is the master-gardener who appoints Adam and Eve as vice-gardeners and stewards over his creation. Likewise, Jesus is the Good Shepherd who calls Peter to act as a vice-shepherd, charged with the responsibility of feeding Christ’s sheep (John 21:17). In this same way, while Paul is both a brother and a son under the care of the heavenly Father, he also envisions his role as that of a father under The Father, a father who grants a specific identity to his Corinthian community. As noted earlier, Paul is not merely a teacher among thousands, he is the unique teacher who has founded this church and to whom the community can trace their birth. Far from instilling fear, Paul’s claim of paternity is intended to be a call to return to their true identity as heirs to the kingdom. In essence Paul draws attention to the fact that the behavior of the Corinthians is not fitting as members of his family. If they are his children shouldn’t their values and behavior match his own?

What Paul states implicitly by use of the father metaphor in v. 15 he states explicitly in v. 16 when he exhorts the Corinthians “be imitators of me.” Despite the fact

¹³³ Joubert, “Managing the Household,” 216.

that a Western audience may easily misconstrue Paul's words here as egotistical, his first-century audience would have quickly understood his true intention. As Hellerman observes, "In contrast to contemporary American practices, the ideal son in the ancient world was typically expected to adopt his father's general lifestyle, including, among other things, his father's religious orientation, means of a livelihood, and place of residence."¹³⁴ For Paul to refer to himself as a father and simultaneously call on the community he has begotten to imitate him is nearly redundant, but fitting. To be a child in the first century was to follow in the footsteps of one's father. As Clement of Alexandria once wrote, "The man who has produced of himself one like him has achieved fulfillment- even more when he sees the other having followed in his footsteps too, in other words, when he has established a child in the same natural place as the father."¹³⁵

Here one finds that in the same way that biological families looked to their fathers as leaders worth emulating, so too did the house churches of the early centuries of Christianity. In fact, as mentioned earlier, the responsibilities of the two roles, familial leadership and church leadership, were so similar that failure in the former sphere excluded one from leadership in the latter. In Paul's letter to Timothy he asserts that anyone who pursues the office of overseer (Gk. ἐπίσκοπή) must be one "who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity" (1 Tim 3:4).

Paul then asks rhetorically, "but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?" (1 Tim 3:5). The implication in

¹³⁴ Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family*, 102.

¹³⁵ Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 2.139.6.

Paul's mind is clear; how one manages one's earthly family is a significant indicator of one's fitfulness to manage the church, God's family. Or, as Dan Allendar states bluntly, "If a parent refuses to care for his own family, we ought not to expect that he will serve, suffer, and sacrifice himself for the larger family of God."¹³⁶ Furthermore, by comparing earthly households with the family of God Paul reiterates the argument, noted earlier, that he envisioned the role of the pastor as a metaphorical surrogate-father over God's heavenly family. Hence, in light of Paul's conviction regarding the explicit connection between the leadership of earthly families and the family of God, his call to be imitated is far less suspect. As David Garland observes:

The call to imitate him is based on the fact that he is their father as the founder of the church who introduced them to the gospel. He is not a lowly, slave child-minder threatening them with a rod but a father who loves them and sets an example for them to follow. His chastening of them is leavened by a father's love and a spirit of gentleness that does not seek to shame but to reform. If there is any recrimination in the tone of what he says, it springs from anger caused by his anxiety over the welfare of his children.¹³⁷

From Paul's perspective the value of being a leader worth imitating is no less important in the realm of ministry than it is in the family; for in the sphere of ministry integrity is not only valued, but expected, and the consequences of moral failure have greater implications for the entire community of God's people. As Derek Prime and Alistair Begg state emphatically, "*Whatever else* a shepherd and teacher provides for God's people, he is to give them an example to follow."¹³⁸

Those who view Paul's exhortation for the Corinthians to imitate him as a

¹³⁶ Dan B. Allender, *How Children Raise Parents* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2003), 32.

¹³⁷ Garland, *1 Corinthians*, 144.

¹³⁸ Derek Prime & Alistair Begg, *On Being Pastor: Understanding Our Calling and Work* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2004), 35 (emphasis mine).

manipulative power play do so without a fuller reading of Pauline letters in which Paul repeatedly admonishes his churches to refrain from the exultation of individual leaders over the person of Christ (1 Cor 1:12-13; 1 Cor 3:4, 20-23), while persistently advocating an appreciation for the inherent value of every member of the congregation and the diversity of gifts which should be celebrated within the community of God (1 Cor 12ff; Eph 4:8ff). Furthermore, any attempt to use Paul's words as an example of ecclesiastical power-wielding fails to grasp the sincerity by which Paul employs the father metaphor. Indeed, would any society uphold as an acceptable model of fatherhood one in which fathers disregarded the need to be positive examples to their children? As sociologist David Popenoe writes, "one of the most significant qualities of being a father, and certainly the most frequently cited, is serving as a role model. Imitation, or modeling, is the most potent learning process."¹³⁹

In addition, to the realm of familial leadership, the importance of serving as a model for others is considered one of the most important disciplines in organizational leadership. According to Kouzes and Posner the value of leaders serving as positive role models is consistently ranked as the single most important aspect of successful leadership. They write, "Exemplary leaders know that if they want to gain commitment and achieve the highest standards, they must be models of the behavior they expect of others. *Leaders model the way.*"¹⁴⁰ Later, Paul would echo this same mandate to his successor Timothy when he would charge him to conduct himself in such a way so as to, "show yourself an example of those who believe" (1 Tim 4:12).

¹³⁹ David Popenoe, *Life Without Father*, 142.

¹⁴⁰ James Kouzes & Barry Posner *The Leadership Challenge* (San Francisco, CA: Josey-Bass, 2007), 15 (emphasis mine).

Undoubtedly, many commentators may continue to reflect back to the instruction of Christ discussed earlier that his followers are “to call no father” and consider Paul’s employment of the title to be a significant, and flagrant disregard for the teaching of Christ. Yet, it is essential to note, as William Hendrickson reminds us, “to state a fact is one thing; to yearn for distinctions and honors above one’s fellowmen, and unrelated to the glory that is due to Christ, is something different. It is the latter that Jesus condemns.”¹⁴¹ In other words, as stated previously, the central thrust of Christ’s prohibition was opposition to the pursuit of honor and status. For Paul to state that the Corinthians were given new birth (“born again”) by Paul is a factual statement, and the fact that Paul refers to his work is done “in Christ Jesus” further ensures that Paul fully understands the need for all religious leaders to deflect all glory to the Savior.

But Paul moves the conversation beyond mere factual statements when he employs the father metaphor again in his first letter to the Thessalonians. It is here that one begins to grasp the clearest representation of Paul’s pastoral vision when he explicitly outlines the roles and functions of those who consider themselves as fathers in the family of God.

1 Thessalonians 2:10-12

The second time Paul makes use of the father metaphor it is in his letter to the church in Thessalonica. Paul writes, “You are witnesses, and *so is* God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; just as you know how we *were* exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father *would* his own children, so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory” (1 Thess 2:10-12).

¹⁴¹ William Hendrickson, *Matthew, NTC* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1973), 824.

The outline to Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians is viewed, in broad terms, as a series of instructions and an apology.¹⁴² In regards to warnings, Paul writes to challenge incorrect and/or unacceptable views on sexuality (4:3-8), the relationship between Christ and those who have passed away (4:13-18) and the second coming of Christ (5:1-11). Secondly, and key to the discussion here, is a defense of his ministry which begins in 2:1. Given Paul's reference to his diligence and faithfulness, we might suspect that some in the Thessalonian community had begun to question Paul's motives in sharing the gospel. According to Paul, and in his own defense, his ministry was not one marked by comfort and ease (2:2), nor was he looking for flattery or the approval of men (2:4-5).

Furthermore, it is clear from the text that Paul was also facing charges of abandonment by his fledgling church. Against rising suspicions that his absence signaled a disregard for his new church, Paul confesses that he experienced "great desire to see their face" and states emphatically, "For we wanted to come to you" (2:17, 18). Here, Paul attempts to rebuild his reputation as a committed pastor who labored faithfully on behalf of his newly established church (2:9), not as one that merely preyed upon the Thessalonians as another convenient source of quick funds.¹⁴³

This background serves as a necessary framework for Paul's use of a number of familial images employed amidst his apology and defense. Given the severity of the charges brought against him, it is particularly important to note that Paul does not defer to political metaphors but familial ones in addressing his congregation.

¹⁴² G. K. Beale, *1-2 Thessalonians, IVPNTC* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 13-18.

¹⁴³ It was common practice in Paul's era for philosophers to make an easy living by traveling from town to town in pursuit of naïve audiences willing to pay them for their wisdom and insight. Due to his sudden absence it is likely that the Thessalonians had succumbed to rumors that perhaps the Apostle Paul was no different. See Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians, NICNT* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 52.

While Paul will move quickly through the metaphors of both children and nursing mothers, he will conclude his images with the father metaphor. While in no way exhaustive, Paul's reference to himself as a father to the Thessalonian community grants his readers significant insight into his understanding of pastoral duties and responsibilities. In fact, given the centrality of the role of the family in both Greek and Jewish cultures of the first century one could argue that Paul's use of familial language in general, and the paternal imagery in this passage particularly, presents pastors with a clear paradigm through which to view their calling.

Immediately after making reference to the metaphors of a nursing mother, children, and brothers (1 Thess 2:7,8), Paul prepares to liken himself to a father (2:11) by calling attention to the way in which he conducted himself among the Thessalonians. He writes, "You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers" (2:10). As he does in his letter to the Corinthians Paul points to his own life and ministry as an example for the Thessalonians to follow.

While not as explicit as his reference in 1 Corinthians 4:16, Paul's defense of his apostolic authority and mission among the Thessalonian community is strikingly similar to his defense among the Corinthians. In both letters Paul connects his faithfulness among the churches with his role among them as a spiritual father. In turn, Paul uses the father metaphor as the central rationale for heeding his implicit and explicit requests to follow his lead. Paul's intention is to indicate to the Thessalonians that since they are "witnesses" to the life of their spiritual father, they, as spiritual children of Paul's, should go and do likewise.

As was noted earlier, to the ears of a modern audience the thought of a leader

calling others to an imitation of their lives is suspicious at best and at worst, megalomaniacal. Yet, as the Stoic philosopher Seneca, a contemporary of the Apostle Paul, once wrote, wise people seek the counsel of those who “teach us by their lives, who tell us what to do, then prove it by practice, who show us what we should avoid, and then are never caught doing that which they have ordered us to avoid.”¹⁴⁴

The necessity for leaders to serve as models for their followers is highly important. However, similar to the way that humility is lost by oneself the moment it is publicly recognized, Paul falls victim here, in the eyes of some scholars, to a no-win situation in which he needs to be an example without ever referring to himself as one. It is the view of this author that no such dichotomy exists and that it is precisely Paul’s employment of father metaphor specifically that helps one navigate the waters.

As a spiritual father to God’s family Paul clearly recognizes his deep responsibility to lead God’s family in a manner consistent with many of the responsibilities inherent to earthly fathers the world over, one of which being the need to serve as guides and role models for their children. As a man who refers to himself as “the chief of all sinners” (1 Tim 1:15), Paul is deeply aware of his own shortcomings and failures. What Paul asks his disciples to recognize and imitate in him is not merely his outward lifestyle but his devotion toward God. As any father would in the first century (Greek or Jewish), Paul desires that his spiritual children will fully adopt his religion, that the God he preaches will become their God and that the gospel he embraces will be fully embraced by them as well, not because Paul seeks his own glory or renown, but because his heart is fully inclined towards the good of the community he is founded, verified repeatedly by the way in which he devoted himself fully to their care and development.

¹⁴⁴ Seneca, *Epistulae morales ad Lucilium*, 52.

In addition to this, Paul also identifies himself as teacher. It is noteworthy to recognize the natural progression of Paul's thoughts here, for in doing so we readily note that Paul understood the necessity of *both* modeling and educating. As revealed by the quote from Seneca cited earlier, attempting to fulfill one responsibility without the other is nonsensical. According to Wanamaker, in joining imitation with instruction Paul modeled "the best standards of moral education in the Greco-Roman world."¹⁴⁵

In ancient society, while the mother role was synonymous with producing, caring for and nurturing offspring,¹⁴⁶ the responsibility of instruction was laid primarily on the shoulders of the father.¹⁴⁷ Given such realities it is not surprising that "Paul understands his didactic role as a paternal obligation, one that is carried out in the tenderness of a Greek father."¹⁴⁸ In describing the way in which Paul instructed the community he discusses both his methods as well as his manner.

In regards to his methodology Paul points out that he did not merely teach to the masses but to individuals, "each one of you" (v. 11). Leon Morris points out the significance of this by writing, "In other words, he had not contented himself with giving the message in general terms to the Thessalonian public at large, but had been sufficiently interested in individuals to bring it home to them one by one, evidently in private."¹⁴⁹ This insight casts further light on Paul's inference to himself as a father, for in his genuine and tender care for each member of the community Paul was not content to teach

¹⁴⁵ Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text, NIGTC* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 108.

¹⁴⁶ Hellerman, *Ancient Church as Family*, 33-35.

¹⁴⁸ Green, *Letters to the Thessalonians*, 135.

¹⁴⁹ Leon Morris, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: An Introduction and Commentary, TNTC* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984), 60.

them as a philosopher would in the city square but as father would his own children, taking into consideration the uniqueness of each child and adapting his teaching accordingly.

Second, Paul reveals the manner of his teaching by the use of three verbs *exhorting, comforting and imploring*. The first of the three verbs, “*exhorting*” (Gk. παρακαλέω, *parakaleo*) is the one which Paul uses the most frequently throughout his letters.¹⁵⁰ While used in isolation the word *parakaleo* would normally carry the weight of exhortation and instruction associated with urging a person to follow a specific code of moral behavior,¹⁵¹ here Paul joins it with the verb “*encouraging*” (Gk. παραμυθέομαι) to emphasize that Paul’s exhortations were designed as tools of “comforting” or “consoling.”¹⁵²

Paul’s goal was not merely to command obedience from the Thessalonians, but to also empower them to be obedient. In this Paul does not shrink back from the seriousness of his message, but purposefully joins the two verbs in order to suggest one who is comforting in times of distress, “which is in keeping the ‘father and his own children’ imagery with which the sentence began.”¹⁵³

Finally, Paul uses the word “imploring” (Gk. μαρτύρομαι). The verb is used sparingly by Paul in his letters appearing only here and two additional times in all of his letters (Gal 5:3, Eph 4:17). It is undoubtedly the strongest of the three verbs listed here

¹⁵⁰ Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 82.

¹⁵¹ Green, *Letters to the Thessalonians*, 135.

¹⁵² F.F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, WBC Vol. 45 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1982), 36.

¹⁵³ Green, *Thessalonians*, 82.

and while there is little agreement regarding the precise meaning of this word,¹⁵⁴ scholars do agree that the essence of it carries with it the notion of insistence or requirement.¹⁵⁵

The verb unearths aspects of Paul's pastoral perspective that have proven to be problematic for some, specifically his understanding of pastoral authority. According to B. Holmberg, Paul's use of "the image of fatherhood is not only used to characterize Paul's attitude to his own communities, but is also meant as a description of how they should conduct themselves toward their spiritual father."¹⁵⁶ The underlying assumption, of course, is that when Paul employed the father metaphor in addressing the Thessalonians he did so not to help them understand the nature of his role and responsibilities towards them as an apostle, but as one who was asserting a new model of church leadership previously prohibited by Jesus himself.¹⁵⁷

However, interpreting Paul's words as a promotion of an authoritative hierarchal ecclesiology is only possible by removing his words from their biblical context and ignoring the overwhelming references to himself by use of another dominant household image, that of a "servant" or "slave" (Gk. *doulos*) (cf. (Rom 1:1; Gal 1:10; Titus 1:1). Despite the negative connotations associated with the position in ancient Greece, the metaphor of a servant "was the image that became the dominant metaphor for Christian

¹⁵⁴ Green, *Thessalonians*, 82.

¹⁵⁵ Green, *Thessalonians*, 136.

¹⁵⁶ B. Holmberg, *Paul and Power: The Structure and Authority in the Primitive Church as Reflected in the Pauline Epistles*, ConBNT (Philadelphia; Fortress Press, 1980), 78.

¹⁵⁷ Joseph Hellerman writes, "when Paul refers to himself with paternal terminology, he is innovating vis-à-vis the family model we observed with Jesus of Nazareth when he commanded his disciples "Call no one your father on earth, for you have one Father- the one in heaven" (Matt. 23:9) in *Ancient Church as Family*, 123.

service and leadership.”¹⁵⁸ In stark contrast to the practices of the times Leon Morris notes that, “Christianity was no sleek imitation of ecclesiological organizations. It made no attempt to set up a hierarchy modeled on previously existing institutions. It took a term in common use for the most ordinary kind of service and made that its characteristic term for ministering.”¹⁵⁹

Any assessment of the few instances Paul chooses to use the father metaphor needs to be held in balance by this additional metaphor employed far more frequently by leaders in the earliest years of the Christian movement. A refusal to allow these two metaphors to guide our interpretation of Paul’s pastoral theology is to create a Paul of multiple personalities, a Paul who is at times power hungry and authoritarian, while at other times clearly humble and self-sacrificing.

To maintain any sense of integrity one must read Paul in light of both metaphors recognizing that servant-hood and authority are not mutually exclusive terms. The truth of the matter is that by reading Paul faithfully one is able to emerge with a holistic view of leadership that balances any call to positions of authority as a call first to serve those under one’s care. While this does not diminish the strength by which Paul commands his audience to heed his words, it graciously admits that the ability to speak the truth in love, as one serving others, is a fundamental requirement in genuine relationships. Few people, if any, would misinterpret my own motivations if I *implored* my children to obey my command to refrain from touching a hot stove or stepping back from oncoming traffic no matter how strongly I demanded it. Such imploring does not constitute a desire for patriarchal authority as much as it demonstrates effective and responsible parenting.

¹⁵⁸ Bennett, *Metaphors*, 122.

¹⁵⁹ Leon Morris, *Ministers of God* (London: InterVarsity Press, 1964), 35.

Paul's reference to himself as a father to the Thessalonians later in the same verse demonstrates that his stern call for obedience is that of an urging father who loves his children and knows (often in ways that his children do not yet know) the consequences of their actions. Far from disqualifying him for leadership, Paul's willingness to boldly direct his congregations towards righteousness is the very thing that allows him to serve as a model for modern pastors. In an age where pastors are consistently tempted to trade the truth for political correctness, Paul's refusal to water down the demands of discipleship serves as a bold reminder of the responsibilities pastors receive at their calling to do no less for their own congregations.

Scholars agree that by joining together these three separate aspects of instruction; exhorting, encouraging and imploring, Paul intended for his audience to identify a single, unified thought that conveyed Paul's commitment to the overall duties of a father to his children in keeping them on the path of righteousness.¹⁶⁰

Ultimately Paul recognizes his responsibility to instruct his congregations as a call to reorient them into a new reality in which old definitions, loyalties, and paradigms are replaced and reorganized by the radical message of the gospel. In essence, one of Paul's foremost responsibilities to the communities he founded was to reorient them towards their new identities in Christ.

At the close of this series of verses, Paul embraces his role as a father to the Thessalonian community by recognizing that a primary aspect of his pastoral responsibilities is to establish and reinforce his congregation's identity. In the final verse of this passage Paul calls on his community to "walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory" (v.12). As Charles Wanamaker asserts

¹⁶⁰ Fee, *Thessalonians*, 82.

“perhaps the most important contribution of Paul to the formation of the Christian community in Thessalonica was that he gave his converts a new sense of identity as converts.”¹⁶¹ According to Wayne Meeks this was accomplished by Paul in his use of language that spoke of both “belonging” and “separation.”¹⁶²

Particularly important to this study is Paul’s emphasis of identity through belonging. By way of Christian conversion Paul, like Jesus, uses familial metaphors to highlight a convert’s identity as a member of a new spiritual family. In order to do so Paul consistently refers to members in the Christian community throughout each of his letters as “children” (cf. Rom 8:14; 2 Cor 6:13; Gal 3:7, 4:7) “brothers” (cf. 2 Cor 1:1; Cor 1:1; 1 Thess. 3:2) and “sisters” (Rom 16:1).

Extending the familial metaphor even further Paul chooses on certain occasions to make reference to himself as a spiritual father. As noted earlier some have voiced suspicions about Paul’s motivations for referencing paternal imagery, yet when viewed through the lens of Paul’s ultimate intentions to shape the communities’ identity, his choice of metaphors appears less authoritarian and more in line with cultural expectations of the day, and fitting for his message.

As noted earlier, both Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures affirmed key aspects of the father role including the conviction that the patriarch was the one to whom the primary responsibility of socialization fell. For the Apostle Paul this meant, specifically, that an essential aspect of his apostolic duty was to orient his new churches towards a fuller understanding of their new citizenship within the Kingdom of God. Just as parents

¹⁶¹ Charles Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 16.

¹⁶² Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), 84-96.

were charged with the responsibility of initiating their children into the cultural, political and religious life of the Roman or Jewish cultures, so now Paul was charged, as a spiritual father, to *re-establish* the values and perspectives of members of the new Christian movement.

In every religious conversion individuals are confronted by a radically new world-view in which former perspectives of identity, purpose and meaning are imbued with new definitions and implications for life. “In a religious conversion experience a person becomes engaged with a new set of significant others who possess an alternative understanding of life and participate in an alternative social world with its own distinctive knowledge, roles, values, and attitudes.”¹⁶³

Certainly this was no less true for the community at Thessalonica who had been significantly influenced by their Jewish upbringing. Faced with ongoing persecution and hedonistic temptations Paul reminds his audience that they are indeed a peculiar people who have been “called” by God himself into new relationships, with God, with each other and with the world. The church at Thessalonica, Paul reminds them, is invited into a new kingdom where they are privileged to behold God in all his glory. It is only within this new kingdom framework that Paul’s use of the father metaphor makes the most sense.

In God’s kingdom relationships are reorganized. Under God’s new economy kinship is defined less by blood than by fidelity to the King (cf. Matt 10:37; 12:50) causing “the early Christians to self-consciously define the church as a surrogate kinship group [that] implicitly demand[ed] of community members a loyalty that excluded every competing social entity in the surrounding culture- including a convert’s natural

¹⁶³ Charles Wannamaker, “Like a Father Treats His Own Children,” JTSA 92 (September 1995), 46-55.

family.”¹⁶⁴ Particularly as it pertains to the Thessalonian community Gene L. Green observes:

These new believers were at variance with their compatriots in the city (2:14) and the conflicts likely descended to the members of their families as well. Those who are alienated and outcast now find their identity in this new family of God, both in Thessalonica and in other cities of Macedonia (4:9-10), with the “mothers/fathers” who love them, the apostles themselves.¹⁶⁵

Conclusion

As D.A. Carson reminds us, “Our nuclear families do not go into eternity, but the church does. In Christ we gain spiritual fathers, siblings and children.”¹⁶⁶ Tracing Paul’s thought through his letters to both the Corinthian and Thessalonian communities one discovers that Paul clearly understood the teaching of Jesus to refrain from “calling no man father” in a manner distinct from some scholars today who have chosen to interpret his words as an early attempt to establish a new form of church hierarchy. Fundamental to the debate is a thorough analysis of the family context from which Paul wrote and a willingness to suspend the temptation to import modern cultural blinders into the exegesis process.

When one is able to do so faithfully, the apparent dichotomy between authority and service is replaced with a greater understanding of the sincerity with which Paul employs paternal language among his converts, though infrequently and cautiously. Far from positioning himself as an authoritarian patriarch, we have seen that Paul’s reference to himself as a father is intended to convey a holistic pastoral theology based on the core

¹⁶⁴ Hellerman, *Ancient Church as Family*, 24.

¹⁶⁵ Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 129. See also Abraham J. Malherbe, “Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophic Tradition of Pastoral Care,” *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 32B. (New York and London: Doubleday, 2000), 48-52.

¹⁶⁶ D.A. Carson, “The Pastor as Son of an Earthly Father,” February 5, 2008.

responsibilities of procreating, bestowing identity, providing instruction in various forms (including discipline) and serving his followers as a role model. As was revealed earlier, the priority of each of these duties stemmed from Paul's understanding of the role of fathers in his Greco-Roman and Jewish contexts as leaders who performed many of the same duties among their own children.

It was also demonstrated that Paul's adoption of the father metaphor followed a familiar biblical pattern in which leaders are simultaneously called to submit to the authority of God as followers and to function as leaders in the community as well. Towards this end we found that Paul envisions himself as both a son to his heavenly father and as a surrogate father among the family of God, such that he was able to call himself "father."

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Cultural Decline of Fatherhood

As I begin an overview of literature pertinent to this discussion, I want to first provide a concise history of the cultural changes in the perception of fathers which has developed in America over the last several centuries in order to provide a framework for a discussion on the way in which the identity crisis for pastors in the Church mirrors much of what has happened in regards to the identity of biological fathers on a social level. Next, I will explore literature in the areas of psychology, and leadership and then return once again to a discussion of biblical metaphors with an aim of developing a more holistic picture of the inherent connections between the role of spiritual fathers and the role of biological fathers.

I begin by noting that few books in the last century have been more influential in the fatherhood debate as David Blankenhorn's work titled *Fatherless America*.¹ What is unique about Blankenhorn's writing is the way in which he started a lasting dialogue about fatherhood that transcended typical discussions about the practicalities of fatherhood and instead argued for an awakening in the American psyche for a new definition of fatherhood altogether. Distinct from the role of mothers, who acquire a clear identity biologically through birth and bonding, Blankenhorn proposed that the role of fathers is more mysterious, less clear in its definition and implication. Blankenhorn writes, "Compared to mothers, fathers are less born than made...As a social role, fatherhood is less the inelastic result of sexual embodiment than the fragile creation of

¹ David Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America: Confronting Our Most Urgent Social Problem* (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, 1995).

cultural norms.”² Drawing on Max Weber’s concept of “ideal social types”³ Blankenhorn conducted national surveys attempting to determine the American consensus of what an ideal father was with an aim of constructing a new cultural model.

His findings recognized the unique contribution from fathers to their children in four areas namely, protection, provision, cultural transmission, and nurturing.⁴ In brief, he concluded his work by summarizing the sentiments of the thousands he interviewed by stating that the ideal father is “the man who puts his family first.”⁵ The fact that his simplistic conclusion appears to only raise more questions than answer (i.e. What is a family? What does it mean to put a family first?) gives credence to the fact that Blankenhorn’s questions about fatherhood in America were asked of a nation where ambiguity and uncertainty regarding the role of fatherhood was on the rise.

While Blankenhorn’s work remains one the most influential titles on the subject of fatherhood, his foundational assumption was anything but novel. Just as numerous scholars have also suggested, Blakenhorn built his research upon the foundational assumption that the roots of our current fatherhood dilemma stemmed largely from the cultural and historical changes that occurred during the Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th century, when factories replaced the home as the sphere in which families spent the majority of their day.⁶ The leading hypothesis regarding this historic change was that

² Blankenhorn, *Fatherless America*, 65.

³ Max Weber, trans. H. H. Gerth & C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946).

⁴ Blankenhorn, 25.

⁵ Blankenhorn, 5.

⁶ Ralph DeRossa, *The Modernization of Fatherhood: A Social and Political History* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1997), 26-30. See also Stephen M. Frank, *Life with Father: Parenthood and*

in order for the Industrial Revolution to flourish, it needed not only sufficient workers, but sufficient consumers. In order to attract both, industry needed to create a new social reality that could undermine an agrarian paradigm that enabled families to be self-sufficient entities which produced and consumed their own products.⁷ Healthy families, with present fathers, inhibited the growth of factories with an increasing need for workers. As fathers left the farm, families were no longer able to produce the goods they needed to survive, forcing them to turn to the goods produced by the factories that had lured away their fathers. In essence, industry created a need that only industry alone could fill. This very notion is noted in the words of Edward Filene who famously wrote:

“...since the head of the family is no longer in control of the economic process through which the family must get its living, he must be relieved of many ancient responsibilities and therefore of many of his prerogatives... Women... and children are likely to discover that their economic well-being comes not from the organization of the family but from the organization of industry, and they may look more and more for individual guidance, not to their fathers, but to the *truths* which science is discovering.”⁸

As a growing number of individuals bought into this new cultural vision, fatherhood in particular, was affected in two key ways. First, fathers lost a defining role within their household in the face of new social definitions of what it meant to be “productive.” While prior generations defined production as the work that a family did together for survival of itself, the industrial age turned productivity into the need for the father to become a wage earner while mother stayed at home to create and nurture a

Masculinity in the Nineteenth-Century American North (Baltimore, MD: The John Hopkins university Press, 1998) or Robert Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

⁷ Brink Lindsey, *The Age of Abundance: How Prosperity Transformed America's Politics and Culture* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2008), 67.

⁸ Edward A. Filene, *Successful Living in This Machine Age* (Charleston, SC: Nabu Press, 2011), 132.

spiritual world that sheltered the family from the man's world of industry.⁹

Secondly, in the Victorian age fathers lost not only their position as providers and protectors of the home literally, but spiritually as well. In the literal absence of male, spiritual leaders, mothers become the new spiritual head of the home. As Stuart Ewen observes, "Victorianism elevated the patriarchal home into a spiritual sanctuary against the realities of the productive sphere. Women's work, within the Victorian code, had also moved from the productive to the spiritual."¹⁰ David Popenoe clarifies this transition when he writes, "In the modern nuclear family women could leave productive (including farm) work- thanks to the men's outside income- to become full-time mothers and housewives. Mothers, not fathers, became the primary parents."¹¹

In stark contrast to the Puritan ideals of early decades of American society, the Industrial Revolution greatly altered the responsibilities typically attributed to fathers in light of their physical absence from the home for extended hours of the day. Where fathering had once taken place naturally throughout the daily routine of work, worship and rest now fell squarely on the shoulders of the one parent who was present each day, the mother.¹² As a consequence, fathers also lost significant influence on a social level. The notion that "the hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world,"¹³ emerged as a rising reality in the United States as more women were left at home to do the work of both parents in the development of their children.

⁹ Frank, *Life with Father*, 25-26.

¹⁰ Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness* (New York, NY: Basic Book, 2001), 126.

¹¹ David Popenoe, *Life Without Father* (New York: Martin Kessler Book, 1996), 81.

¹² Popenoe, *Life Without Father*, 88.

¹³ William Ross Wallace, "What Rules the World," a poem first published in 1865.

While Calvin Coolidge was busy proclaiming “the man who builds a factory builds a temple...and it is there, in the shadow of the industrial altar, that worship must shift,”¹⁴ women were often left at home building a new society of leaders. In a matter of decades the typical role of a father as the primary developer of his children had all but vanished. While fathers were busy producing factories and finding their identity in the workplace, their sense of responsibility towards their children decreased, while the cultural hope for humanity in the rearing of children increasingly rested on mothers. As such, “Victorianism had transmitted the Puritan rule of the father and the stern authorities which he symbolized, and carried it into a historical epoch which was making the father less and less a determining factor on the social landscape.”¹⁵

Given these observations it is understandable why the adoption of the father metaphor in pastoral ministry may have also drifted towards irrelevance in recent years. My hypothesis is that the current cultural climate has made it difficult for pastors to adopt the father metaphor without incurring further debate about its implications, either from their parishioners, the culture at large, or from their own internal struggles with the term.

However, I want to also suggest in the following section that pastors themselves can play an important role in stemming the tide of cultural ambiguity regarding fatherhood in America by exploring the inherent similarities between biological fathers and spiritual fathers in the area of generativity. As I do so I want to contend that as cultural generative leaders, pastors in particular can play a central part in restoring the image of fatherhood in America today.

¹⁴ Calvin Coolidge in a speech “The Press Under a Free Government” given before the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Washington, D.C. on January 17, 1925.

¹⁵ Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness*, 125.

Generativity

In recent decades psychology has played an increasingly important role in the study of leadership. As it relates to pastoral ministry in particular, Erik Erikson's theory of generativity is helpful in discussing the parallels which exist when we view the American pastor as both a biologically and culturally generative father. The theory of generativity was first introduced by Erik Erikson in his seminal work entitled *Childhood and Society* in 1950.¹⁶ In it, Erikson challenged the prevailing Freudian thought that personality development occurred primarily within the early years of childhood. Instead, Erikson posited that personality develops in eight distinct stages occurring over the course of one's entire lifespan. Erikson suggested that each of these stages was marked by what he termed a "normative crisis," punctuated by the resolution between two opposites in tension and defined as "a period of heightened vulnerability and potential."¹⁷

In Erikson's eighth stage of development he theorized that having successfully discerned his or her identity (Erikson's fifth stage) and having established relationships of intimacy, an individual was prepared to direct his or her attention towards the next generation. Erikson reported that the normative crisis of the eighth stage is generativity vs. stagnation, where Erikson defined generativity as "the concern in establishing and guiding the next generation."¹⁸ While Erikson recognized that, for many, generativity was expressed through a desire to bear and rear children, generativity was not limited exclusively to the sphere of parenting. By producing psychobiographical works on such

¹⁶ Erik H. Erikson, *Childhood in Society* (New York: Norton, 1963).

¹⁷ J. Roy Hopkins, "Erik Erikson" in *The Encyclopedia of Psychology*, V. 3, Alan E. Kazdin, Ed (Oxford: Oxford Press, 2000), 234.

¹⁸ Erikson, *Childhood in Society*, 267.

historical figures as Martin Luther¹⁹ and Mahatma Gandhi,²⁰ Erikson acknowledged that one can be generative on a cultural scale as well. As McAdams notes,

The generative adult may also operate on a larger scale and outside of the realm of his or her own family by working for the well-being of future generations through various kinds of activities and enterprises in churches, schools, neighborhoods, communities, organizations and society writ large. At the same time, generativity can be expressed in efforts for social change and even in behaviors that defy the status quo.²¹

While Erikson's theory was studied and taught extensively following its publication, little was published on the theory of generativity specifically for nearly three decades²² until a number of major publications spawned a resurgence of interest in the early eighties. The first was John Kotre who, in 1984, published a work entitled *Outliving the Self*.²³ While Kotre was in major agreement with Erikson's theory he believed that "As regards generativity, Erikson fails to sort out different types, and so his schedule for their appearance is misleading."²⁴ To account for this apparent error, Kotre further organized Erikson's theory by delineating generativity into four major categories: *biological generativity*, the act of begetting of children, *parental generativity*, the act of

¹⁹ Erik Erikson, *Young Man Luther: A Study in Psychoanalysis and History* (New York, Norton, 1962).

²⁰ Erik Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth: On the Origins of Militant Nonviolence* (New York, W. W. Norton & Co, 1969).

²¹ Dan P. McAdams and Regina L. Logan, *The Generative Society: Caring for Future Generations*, Eds. Ed de St. Aubin, Dan P McAdams, Tae-Chang Kim (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Society, 2004), 16.

²² In 2002 George Vaillant published his influential work entitled *Aging Well*. In it he re-categorizes two of Erikson's original stages of development. He deserves to be noted as a leader in the study of adult development, but since his largest contributions to the field do not fundamentally change the essence of the study of generativity described above, his work will not necessarily enlarge the view of generativity presented here. See George E. Vaillant, *Ageing Well* (New York, NY: Little, Brown & Company, 2002).

²³ John Kotre, *Outliving the Self* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1984).

²⁴ Kotre, *Outliving the Self*, 8.

raising children, *technical generativity*, teaching skills to successors (biological or otherwise), and finally *cultural generativity* which Kotre defined as “Creating, renovating, and conserving a symbol system- the ‘mind’ of a culture- (and) explicitly passing it on to successors.”²⁵ Here Kotre served as a catalyst for viewing the work of pastors as, ultimately, generative work which mimics in many ways the influential role of biological fathers in the lives of their children.

Kotre’s conclusions would be supported further within several years by the work of John Snarey who coined the term “generative fathering.”²⁶ Combining the last two categories promoted by Kotre (technical and cultural), Snarey joined the roles of birth fathers, childrearing fathers, and cultural fathers as “men who contribute to and renew the ongoing cycle of the generations through the care they provide.”²⁷ Snarey’s work diverged from previous studies of generativity in three additional ways. First, in an age of heightened attention to the peripheral roles of fathers, Snarey’s work re-established the role of the father as central to the development of healthy children and societies. Second, Snarey explicitly advocated that only “good” fathering should be considered truly “generative,” dismissing Kotre’s argument that generativity could also be the production of evil by speaking not just of the virtue of “care,” but of “constructive care.”²⁸

Snarey’s qualifier in this argument is particularly helpful in light of the current discussions about the father metaphor in pastoral ministry. As stated earlier, since metaphors lack the natural linguistic boundaries of similes, there is often a need to erect

²⁵ Kotre, 12.

²⁶ John Snarey, *How Fathers Care for the Next Generation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

²⁷ Snarey, *How Fathers Care for the Next Generation*, 1.

²⁸ Snarey, 1.

boundaries that can guide the reader/hearer towards a proper use and context. In the case of the father metaphor, it is absolutely essential for the community of God's people to differentiate between negative associations with the identity and role of fathers, and the ideal ones that God has modeled and intended for pastoral leaders.

Thirdly, the most important contribution Snarey made to the study of generativity was that while multiple scholars focused their research on discerning the *motivations for* generativity, Snarey sought to determine the *methodology of* generativity: *how* do good fathers act generatively, and how does good, generative fathering affect successive generations. Specifically, Snarey studied how generative fathers constructively cared for the development of their children in three areas: social-emotional, intellectual-academic, and physical-athletic.

These areas closely parallel many of the aspects inherent in the duties of pastoral ministry whereby pastors are called upon as culturally generative leaders to care for their parishioners in a holistic fashion that ministers to the whole person emotionally, mentally, and physically. Joachim Duyndam further supports the paternal nature of such pastoral care when he describes culturally generative leaders as those who affirm and empower their followers by contributing to their understanding as people who are both accepted, and unique, a process he refers to as "adoption." As culturally generative leaders, pastors specifically play an important role in this process for their parishioners by serving as a spiritual father who continually reminds them of their true identity as sons and daughters within the family of God. Duyndam writes, "Uniqueness is a relational concept. You are unique and irreplaceable *for someone*- your friends your parents, your children, and so forth. In my fairly idealistic view, the adopting father is the first to elect

us and thus make us unique.”²⁹ Towards this end, pastors are inimitably able to play a therapeutic role in the broken lives of their congregants who have yet to be adopted by an earthly father by serving as a culturally generative father themselves. By viewing themselves as spiritual fathers, pastors not only have the potential of serving as the iconic leader of a new spiritual family for their parishioners, but they also, if they choose, can become conduits of cultural change by leading generatively with an aim of seeing future generations return to a healthier picture of the importance of fathers in American society while apprehending what God’s fatherhood means.

Transformational Leadership

Closely aligned with the theory of generativity is the transformational leadership model. In both models the successful leader is identified as one who empowers those under his or her care. As noted earlier, so closely aligned are the two theories that the lives of generative leaders such as Gandhi and Martin Luther King are frequently cited as key examples of transforming leadership as well.³⁰ The unique contribution of transformational leadership to this discussion is the way in which it contributes to a clearer definition of the relationship between pastoral leadership and the nature of authority as it relates to the implementation of casting vision and creating a new future for those who carry much spiritual baggage into their new relationship with their spiritual family and a God who calls himself father.

At the very heart of the debate regarding the father metaphor in pastoral ministry

²⁹ Joachim Duyndam, “Credible fatherhood and unique identity: Toward an Existential Concept of Adoption.” *The European Legacy*, Vol. 12, No. 6, (2007), 729-735.

³⁰ Cf. James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 267, 449, 455-6; James Kouzes & Barry Posner *The Leadership Challenge* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1990), 137-141; Leighton Ford, *Transforming Leadership* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), 30-31.

appears to be the question of the way in which authority is applied (or misapplied) within the church and the wider culture. Specifically, is authority necessary? If so, how is it gained and used appropriately? Despite the fact that both the Old and New Testament support clear lines of leadership (i.e. Moses, David, Paul, etc...) modern writers state that Jesus envisioned an entirely new order for God's Kingdom that called for radical egalitarianism in the family of God.³¹ Sadly for many, equality and authority have become incompatible bedfellows as the word "authority" has become increasingly associated with abuse, oppression, and neglect rather than care, guidance and empowerment. This, despite the fact, that the literature on leadership, both secular and religious, has been dominated in the recent past by proponents of a transformational leadership which explicitly advocates for leadership that gains and administers authority by empowering others, and supporting the value of people over products.

The term "Transformational Leadership" was first coined by J.V. Downton in his book *Rebel Leadership: Commitment and Charisma in a Revolutionary Process*³² and emerged as an important approach to leadership through the writing of a political sociologist named James MacGregor Burns.³³ According to Burns there are two distinct types of leadership, the first being what he called *transactional*, which focuses on the exchanges that occur between leaders and followers (i.e. teachers and grades, employers and promotions, etc...).³⁴ The second he called *transformational* which he defined as leadership that is attentive to the needs and motives of followers in an attempt to help the

³¹ Bartchy, "Undermining Ancient Patriarchy," 68.

³² J.V. Downton, *Rebel Leadership: Commitment and Charisma in a Revolutionary Process* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1973).

³³ James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).

³⁴ Burns, *Leadership*, 4.

followers and leader reach their full potential.³⁵

What the theory of transformational leadership suggests is that true leadership must be transformational leadership if it is considered to be leadership at all. Like successful parenting and positive generative fathering, transformational leadership supports Christ's example as one who "did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

This sacrificial sentiment of service lived out through personal sacrifice is prevalent in today's discussions of leadership, and highlights an important facet of transformational leadership that allows it to be a unifying theory in this discussion about the father metaphor. What is true of generative, biological fathers is equally true for culturally generative spiritual ones as well; true leadership is "modeled" leadership. The sacrificial life of a leader is the life dedicated to the service of his or her followers in tangible ways. Leadership, be it in the home or within the community, cannot merely be what values a leader says that they subscribe to, the vision he or she creates on a spreadsheet, or the instruction they espouse from the dinner table or the pulpit. The old adage, "do what I say, not what I do" speaks of formal leadership and authority gained by position only. It is an insufficient formula for true leadership. Instead, transformational leaders realize their individual success by appealing to the greatest needs of their followers in a process that continually raises the morality and consciousness of both parties.

One predominant means toward this goal is found in the Apostle Paul's invitation to the church in Corinth to imitate him, precisely *because* he was their spiritual father (1 Cor 4:15-16). It is often said that "more is caught than taught," and it is especially true in

³⁵ Burns, *Leadership*, 33.

the realm of leadership. In the first edition of Kouzes and Posner's famous work entitled *The Leadership Challenge*³⁶ they listed five characteristics of effective leadership. Fourth on the list was what they termed "Modeling the Way," which highlighted the importance of leaders being, and setting an example for their followers. By the time that they had drafted their fourth edition of the same work, modeling had risen to the top spot as the most important characteristic of successful leadership. The authors expounded by stating, "Words and plans are not enough. Leaders stand up for their beliefs. They practice what they preach. They show others by their own example that they live by the values that they profess...Leaders provide the standard by which other people in the organization calibrate their own choices and behaviors. In order to set an example, leaders must know their values and live them."³⁷

The importance of being a leader worth imitating is perhaps highlighted even more in the realm of ministry where integrity is not only valued, but expected, and where the consequences of moral failure have greater implications for the community. As Derek Prime and Alistair Begg state emphatically, "*Whatever else* a shepherd and teacher provides for God's people, he is to give them an example to follow."³⁸

With this in view I want to suggest that transformational leadership and cultural generativity both support the father metaphor in pastoral ministry by providing necessary and practical boundaries by which to frame the terminology. It is not my suggestion that pastors merely think of themselves as fathers, but that there metaphorical conception of

³⁶ Kouzes & Posner *The Leadership Challenge*, 187.

³⁷ Kouzes & Posner, 187, 190.

³⁸ Prime & Begg, *On Being Pastor*, 36 (emphasis mine).

pasturing should shape every aspect of their work. Parishioners are not in as much need of pastors who simply consider themselves fathers, as much as they are in need of pastors who help to clarify the very best of what God intends in the word by modeling it in their everyday life. Towards this end, I want to conclude my literature review by returning once again to a discussion of biblical metaphors in order to further discuss the connection between metaphors and application in the realm of pastoral ministry. As was stated earlier, metaphors matter. As significant forces that shape the daily activity and attitudes of pastors, it is wise to consider further how the father metaphor in particular can contribute to the process of pastors embracing further the ideals of cultural generativity and transformational leadership.

Biblical Metaphors

Despite the fact that throughout history scholars have posited over 125 definitions of the word metaphor,³⁹ there is general consensus that in their simplest form metaphors are “a figure of speech in which a word or phrase that ordinarily applies to one kind of object or idea is applied to another, thus suggesting a likeness or analogy between them.”⁴⁰ Originating in Latin (*metaphora*) and Greek (μεταφορά) roots, the word metaphor literally means “transfer.”⁴¹

Due to fact that the use of “metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language,

³⁹ Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 15.

⁴⁰ Paul C. Rosenblatt, *Metaphors of Family Systems Theory* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1994), 12.

⁴¹ Rosenblatt, *Metaphors of Family Systems Theory*.

but in thought and action as well,”⁴² exploration of metaphors related to pastoral leadership has found attention, albeit brief, in pastoral theology for some time.⁴³ This is fitting since metaphors play a key role in the understanding of roles and identity. In turn the metaphors pastors choose to speak about the communities they serve become crucial allies (or enemies) in the pursuit of their own pastoral identity as well as guides in the work they are attempting to accomplish.

Despite the inherent value of metaphors in ministry formation, there has been, historically, a scarcity of resources dedicated exclusively to the exploration of biblical metaphors for leadership outside of brief comments made about them in generalized works on pastoral theology. One work that does attempt to bridge the gap is David Bennett’s *Metaphors of Ministry*⁴⁴ in which he offers an overview of terms applied to leaders throughout the four Gospels and the book of Acts in particular.

In more recent years, a handful of pastors and theologians have slowly come to recognize and embrace the power of metaphorical language in the face of the current questions of pastoral identity unveiled in chapter one. In addition to Bennett’s generalized work, resources related to biblical metaphors are beginning to emerge that take seriously the connection between what pastors believe and how they conduct their ministerial task. Instead of proposing a multitude of options however, new works tend to focus solely on the discussion of a singular metaphor with an aim of presenting an

⁴² George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 3.

⁴³ Cf. Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology*, 49 or William H Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 2002).

⁴⁴ David W. Bennett, *Metaphors of Ministry: Biblical Images for Leaders and Followers* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004).

exegetical framework and practical implications for pastoral ministry. The two most predominant areas of research to date focus on the pastoral metaphors of the CEO/manager and the shepherd.

Mark Griffin has proposed the CEO as an important metaphor for pastoral leadership in his book *Pastor, CEO*. In the opening chapter he argues “The world has changed. People have changed. The church has changed. With these changes comes the need for pastors to re-examine, redefine and change the role of pastor from the traditional position.”⁴⁵ In an article titled “Pastor or CEO” published in *Ministry Magazine*, Johnny Miller shares a similar perspective as he recounts an interview in which a pastor admits “The ministry today is a business, and the successful pastor has to be a businessman.”⁴⁶ Robert Kress agrees stating empathically, “It is time to recognize that priests are ‘other Christs’ precisely as C.E.O.’s in the pastoral care of the orderliness of the church. That is their vocation. That is their job.”⁴⁷ Additionally, Michael Anthony and James R. Estep have added their own voices to the discussion writing a text they hope will serve as a “foundation of biblical teaching regarding the concepts of management, organization and administrative practice.”⁴⁸

Added to these resources are a number of books and articles dedicated to the defense and definition of the shepherd metaphor. Despite the fact that Blaine McCormick and David Davenport propose that their work offers shepherd as “a new image of

⁴⁵ Mark L. Griffin, *Pastor, CEO: Managing Kingdom Business* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2010), vi.

⁴⁶ Johnny V. Miller, “Pastor or CEO,” *Ministry Magazine*, May, 1992.

⁴⁷ Robert Kress, “The Priest-Pastor as CEO,” *America Magazine*, March 11, 1992.

⁴⁸ Michael Anthony and James R. Estep, *Management Essentials for Christian Ministry* (Nashville, TN: H & H Publishing Group, 2005), 2.

leadership,”⁴⁹ a simple survey of pastoral texts reveals a significantly different story. Indeed, I agree with Tim Laniak when he writes that “One of the primary metaphors by which biblical authors conceptualized leadership is shepherding.”⁵⁰ With this in view Laniak’s research attempts to fill a gap in what he considers to be a lack of resources that “orients the culturally removed contemporary ‘pastor’ to this wealth of material”⁵¹ by offering a text which explores the topic through the lens of Biblical theology.

Added to this key resource are other recent examples attempting to contextualize the shepherd metaphor including Timothy Witmer’s *The Shepherd Leader*. Writing in response to what he refers to as a “shepherding crisis” in the church today, Witmer agrees with Laniak when he asserts that the shepherd metaphor “is at the very heart of the biblical picture of leadership.”⁵² In addition are texts written by H.B. London and Neil Wiseman,⁵³ John MacArthur,⁵⁴ and Robert E. Picirilli.⁵⁵ Each of these authors endeavors to offer a unique and personal reflection on pastoral leadership while affirming the essential nature of the shepherd metaphor for the twenty-first century.

Conversely, as the cultural debate about the identity of biological fathers has

⁴⁹ Blaine McCormick and David Davenport, *Shepherd Leadership: Wisdom for Leaders from Psalm 23* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 1.

⁵⁰ Tim Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 20 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 21.

⁵¹ Tim Laniak, *Shepherds After My Own Heart*, 21.

⁵² Timothy Z. Witmer, *The Shepherd Leader: Achieving Effective shepherding in Your Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2010), 2.

⁵³ H. B. London, Jr. & Neil B. Wiseman, *The Shepherds Covenant for Pastors* (Ventura, CA: Gospel light Publishing, 2005).

⁵⁴ John MacArthur, *Pastoral Ministry: How to Shepherd Biblically* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2005).

⁵⁵ Robert E. Picirilli, *Teacher, Leader, Shepherd: The New Testament Pastor* (Nashville, TN: Randall House Publishing), 2007.

surfaced, one is increasingly hard pressed to find a single work devoted entirely to the father metaphor in pastoral ministry. While a few works, including Bennett's, include it as one option among many in their discussion of leadership metaphors, I have been unable to find a work dedicated entirely to the subject. Historically, studies of the use of the "father" metaphor in religious language have generally been relegated to one of two major categories. First, until very recently, academic work on religious metaphors has been aimed almost solely at the exploration and assessment of the use of the father metaphor for God. Key examples of this work from the last two decades include research conducted by John W. Miller,⁵⁶ Paul Avis,⁵⁷ Janet Martin Sockice,⁵⁸ and Marianne Meye Thompson.⁵⁹

The second, however, is the growing amount of attention the Apostle Paul has received in the last two decades regarding his use of metaphors throughout the New Testament. Each of the scholars conducting research in this area is concerned with determining the context from which Paul borrowed his language with an aim of determining with more accuracy the intent of his meaning. One such contributor is David John Williams whose work centers on a historical examination of the overarching locales of the majority of Paul's metaphors including the city, the country, and the family.⁶⁰ In

⁵⁶ John W. Miller, *Calling God Father: Essays on the Bible, Fatherhood and Culture* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999).

⁵⁷ Cf. Paul Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination: Metaphor Symbol and Myth in Religion and Theology* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

⁵⁸ Janet Martin Soskice, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor: Gender and Religious Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁵⁹ Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2000).

⁶⁰ David John Williams, *Paul's Metaphors: Their Context and Character* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing, 2003).

addition is Caroline Johnson Hodge who argues that a key to understanding Paul's language lies in a greater emphasis on his thoroughly Jewish identity and ethnicity.⁶¹ In contrast, Raymond Collins suggests that while Paul was Jewish by birth, his metaphorical language is best understood in light of the significant influence of the Roman culture in which he was raised.⁶²

Beyond these scholars there is an additional branch of theologians centering their research on Paul's use of the father metaphor specifically. Along with feminist authors such as Elizabeth Castelli,⁶³ Joseph Hellerman and his mentor Scott Bartchy are two influential scholars who have also recently emerged who tend to view the father metaphor in religious writing negatively. Together, their arguments are based on a presupposition that the context of the early church and its sacred writing represents an oppressive and abusive patriarchal society. Their attempt to invalidate the father metaphor speaks to a desire to move the Church towards a more egalitarian, anti-hierarchical structure. Added to this is a longing to minister relevantly in the current climate of absent fathers, where, for many, the metaphor does not conjecture a positive model. In a particularly pointed passage Hellerman suggests "Among the family relationships to be sacrificed in order to become a member of Jesus' group is the follower's 'father.'" In addition he continually denounces the use of paternal images in pastoral ministry noting that "God is the sole father" in all matters relating to provision

⁶¹ Caroline Johnson Hodge, *If Sons then Heirs: A Study of Kinship and Ethnicity in the Letter of Paul* (New York; Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁶² Raymond F. Collins, *The Power of Images in Paul* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008).

⁶³ Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse on Power* (Louisville, TN: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991).

and authority.⁶⁴ Likewise Bartchy offers a nearly identical assessment of the father metaphor when he writes, "Paul's basic model for his communities was a family of siblings without an earthly father. For Paul, almost without exception, only God was to be the father of each community."⁶⁵

In contrast to these authors there remains a small minority of writers who have suggested that the father metaphor may be a useful metaphor in the coming century. Building on the work of both Ernest Best⁶⁶ and Robert Bank,⁶⁷ Trevor Burke is one such author who has penned a number of significant articles and books in the last decade that support Paul's use of the father metaphor among his Corinthian and Thessalonians congregations.⁶⁸ The majority of Burke's research has focused on demonstrating that the negative views on Paul's use of the father metaphor have centered on the term's implications for authority and power while neglecting to highlight the evidence of Paul's unyielding and consistent affection for his congregants as well.⁶⁹

⁶⁴ Joseph Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2001) 78-79.

⁶⁵ Scott Bartchy, "Undermining Ancient Patriarchy: The Apostle Paul's Vision of a Society of Siblings." *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 29 (1999), 69.

⁶⁶ Ernest Best, "Paul's Apostolic Authority—?" *JSNT* Vol. 8, Num. 27 (April, 1986), 3-25.

⁶⁷ Robert Bank, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in Their Historical Setting* (Sydney: Anzea, 1979).

⁶⁸ Cf. Trevor Burke, *Family Matters: A Socio-Historical Study of Kinship Metaphors in I Thessalonians Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, vol. 247 London: T & T Clark International, 2003); *The Message of Sonship: At Home in God's Household*. The Bible Speaks Today (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2011); "Paul's Role as 'Father' to his Corinthian 'Children' in Socio-Historical Context (1 Cor. 4:14-21)." In *Paul and the Corinthians: Studies on a Community in Conflict. Essays in Honour of Margaret Thrall*, eds. Trevor J. Burke and J. Keith Elliott. *Novum Testamentum Supplements* 109 (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

⁶⁹ Cf. Trevor Burke, "Pauline Paternity in 1 Thessalonians," *Tyndale Bulletin* 51.5 (200), 61.

The most recent supporter of Burke's views is Kevin Miller who has added his voice to the conversation by affirming the practical employment of the metaphor in modern, pastoral leadership. As a pastor himself Miller writes "In the 1970s, when Boomers began to graduate from seminary, pastors began shifting their role from shepherd to leader. Now, of course, the leader-CEO model is rejected by many. But what will take its place?... I keep coming back to an ancient answer—one that never seemed so fresh. It's what the third-century Christians called a spiritual father."⁷⁰ While this handful of scholars and pastors hardly demonstrates that the Church is experiencing a resurgence of the father metaphor, their reflections do suggest perhaps that the Church of the twenty-first century is becoming increasingly open to the potential benefits that the father metaphor offers to pastors as they seek to understand their role more fully in the current culture.

Conclusion

David Fisher once wrote that, "The grace of the waiting father forms the church and its ministry."⁷¹ If Fisher is correct, if the mission of the church finds its primary source and identity in the image of their God as a Father, and if the most repeated metaphor for the Church is a family, it is my conviction that the metaphors pastors use must coincide, support, and even reinforce that reality. Given the fact that pastors function as culturally generative fathers provides sufficient impetus for them to engage in their roles in ways that support their congregations in ways similar to biologically generative fathers. This appears to be best accomplished through transformational

⁷⁰ Kevin A. Miller, "From Relevant Dude to Spiritual Father," *Leadership Journal*, Summer 2011, 46.

⁷¹ David Fisher, *The 21st Century Pastor*, 173.

leadership which seeks to empower followers to become increasingly interdependent on one another while working together towards a common purpose and goal. Like biological, generative, fathers, pastors too seek to leave a legacy of leadership and influence that outlives their personal lives, helping a community to flourish according to goals and values that are beyond any one leader's vision. With this in view, I remain convinced that metaphors, and in particular the father metaphor, serves as a powerful tool which can aid pastors in the definition and discovery of their identity as pastors, culturally generative fathers and transformational leaders of the family of God. By embracing the metaphor of a spiritual father pastors can help to bring Christ's kingdom vision into fruition while helping to begin the process of lessening the ambiguity, and even hostility, regarding the identity of fatherhood present in the American culture today.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT DESIGN AND EVALUATION OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this project is to highlight the unique contributions that an increased use of the father metaphor in pastoral ministry grants to the church in the twenty-first century. As has been discussed earlier, research reveals that in recent decades the father metaphor has suffered increasing scrutiny amidst a culture that is equally confused about the role and function of both biological and spiritual fathers.

Given such tumultuous times it is my conviction that the Church has the potential to play a vital role in its efforts to strengthen the fabric of society by encouraging pastors to meet the needs of many of their congregants who are searching for more than just a leader to follow. Today, the sheer number of homes that are broken by divorce, parental absence, abuse or neglect offers pastors sufficient reason to rediscover metaphors that support their ministry among the family of God; in particular, the lost language of the father metaphor.

My assumption at the start of this study is that pastors, who may frequently consider themselves shepherds, prophets or even CEOs, exhibit great hesitation when asked to consider themselves as fathers as well. Therefore, it is my intent to explore the unique contributions that the father metaphor could possibly make to pastoral ministry in terms of the clarity it could lend to the role of the American pastor in the twenty-first century and beyond.

This study is qualitative rather than quantitative. As such it is not intended to make universal claims about pastors and their relationship to the father metaphor. To my

understanding, previous work on the father metaphor in pastoral ministry has not been conducted. In such instances qualitative research is useful in making an initial inquiry of a given topic without the need to solve a problem or offer a decisive solution.¹ My task in this particular qualitative study is to explore the lived experience of a small group of pastors as they interact with the subject of the pastoral metaphors and to describe their experience through their collective narratives. In doing, my desire is to offer a starting point for additional research by developing possible themes that can support more comprehensive research that may be conducted in the future.

Statement of Research Topic

After exploring the role and identity of fatherhood through a variety of lenses I will attempt to demonstrate the need for pastors to adopt the father metaphor in order to assist pastors in their search for clearer pastoral identity and aid them in their practice of pastoral ministry in the twenty-first century.

Guiding Research Questions

My primary research question is: *How can the rediscovery of the father metaphor positively impact the ministry of male, American pastors in the twenty-first century?*

Supporting questions will include:

- What is the relationship between metaphors and leadership, particularly ministerial leadership?
- Why are pastors more inclined to identify themselves with shepherds and CEOs as opposed to fathers and what contributes to any hesitation from pastors to employ the father metaphor in their ministries more frequently?
- In what ways would a pastor who employs the father metaphor impact his local

¹ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (St. Albans Place, London: SCM Press.), 30.

congregation? Consequently, how might it positively impact the ministry of the church in the world?

Method and Sample

For the purpose of this study I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews with eight, male clergy from a variety of denominations who gave written consent to participate. Two pastors were Baptist (General Baptist Convention and Southern Baptist Convention), three were Presbyterians (Evangelical Presbyterian Church), one was a member of the Acts 29 Network, and two represented Non-denominational churches. Their ages ranged from 25 years old to 60, and their racial composition consisted of two African-American pastors and six Caucasian. The racial diversity selected for these interviews (25% African American and 75% Caucasian) served as a sample group of the larger racial makeup of North Carolina which is currently 21.6 % African American and 73.7% Caucasian.²

Each of the pastors had a minimum of five years of pastoral experience in a variety of roles (i.e., youth ministry, small group pastor and assistant pastor). All of the pastors that were selected are currently serving as senior pastors of churches that range in size from 100-1,000. Each was chosen from my personal network of colleagues within my geographical area (within a 60 mile radius). In addition to the convenience of their location, the pastors selected for interviews demonstrated a proven track record of successful leadership within communities that held their reputation in high regard. The pastors who chose to participate in the research were not compensated.

The semi-structured interviews consisted of ten questions pertaining to the role of

² US Census Bureau, 2009. <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/37000.html> (accessed April 25, 2011).

metaphors in pastoral ministry.³ The semi-structured interview was chosen as a means to keep the conversation fairly concise and focused with an equal opportunity for pastors to expand on a given question when necessary. The interviews took place in my personal office or the private offices of the pastors who were interviewed. Each interview was digitally recorded and then transcribed into a word document which was saved on a password protected computer. Records of participation in this research project were kept confidential and were saved on a password protected storage device, kept locked on the private premises of my office.

In order to collect and analyze the data, I chose to employ the methodology of *hermeneutic phenomenology*. According to John Swinton and Harriet Mowat hermeneutic phenomenology can be described as providing both an epistemological as well as an ontological framework which “allows the researcher access into the inner experiences of research subjects...providing deep insights and understandings into the way that things are, [which] enables people to see the world differently, and in seeing it differently to act differently towards it.”⁴ As such hermeneutic phenomenology is not only a methodology but also a method⁵ which places great emphasis on human language and the development of themes from narratives.⁶

Towards this end each interview was transcribed into a typed manuscript which was read and re-read multiple times in an effort to identify key words and themes as I moved from smaller to larger sections of the text. Following an extensive period of

³ See appendix B.

⁴ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 105, 107.

⁵ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 105.

⁶ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 108.

immersion in the texts I identified recurring themes in the interviews. This process of evaluating the transcripts, what Swinton and Mowat refer to as the “hermeneutical circle,”⁷ involved the process of moving from larger to smaller portions of narrative, a movement from “whole to part and back to whole.”⁸

Trustworthiness

In order to ensure trustworthiness of my findings I conducted member checking by sending the final theme chart and corresponding outline back to each pastor interviewed to verify themes and validate findings. Half of the pastors responded to my request and all respondents offered an affirmation of my findings.

Research Bias

According to Swinton and Mowatt, “when one approaches a phenomenon, one inevitably does so with particular prejudices and pre-understandings which inevitably affect the process of interpretation.”⁹ My own personal biases in this study have a professional, a personal, and an academic component to them. Professionally, I work as a college chaplain where I frequently witness the impact and effects of absent and abusive biological fathers on the spiritual lives of students in pastoral counseling sessions. I often hear in counseling sessions about the ways in which their interactions with their biological fathers have inhibited their ability to fully understand God as a father or the multitude of ways that he describes his care for his family throughout the Scriptures. What I have found anecdotally is that one of the most healing roles I can play in these students lives is that of a father figure who begins to, in a very incomplete and ultimately

⁷ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 116.

⁸ H. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1981), 259.

⁹ Swinton and Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 113.

flawed way, help them to recognize the best of what God means when he uses the metaphor “Father.”

Second, my personal story is marked by a rift in my relationship with my own biological father. In the years since I first entered full-time ministry this wound in my own life has been a springboard from which I have gained access into the lives of others as a point of contact for future ministry. While I have found that my father’s absence has also presented me with significant obstacles to understanding the fatherhood of God in my own life, I have also experienced, first-hand, the healing nature of relationships with other men who have been willing to serve as fatherly mentors and guides throughout my spiritual journey.

Finally, in regards to this study specifically, my bias entering the research was that while many pastors frequently think of themselves as shepherds, few would fully embrace the notion that they consider themselves fathers as well. Having studied pastoral theology in formal and informal settings for a number of years now, I was already aware that the shepherd metaphor dominates pastoral theology and my desire through this study was to discern the viability of an additional metaphorical option built upon the image of the father. A primary assumption was that personal and cultural factors, as opposed to professional or practical ones, would actually prove to be the largest obstacles to embracing the father metaphor more fully.

Each of these personal experiences has caused me to favor the father metaphor in pastoral ministry. The absence of a biological father in my own life has highlighted my personal need to find spiritual fathers to fill the gap. My ministry among college students in America today has highlighted the pervasive need for others who are also searching for

spiritual fathers as they struggle to make sense of what it means to call on God as their Abba. At the same time, my years in ministerial training exposed the fact that the father metaphor is almost entirely ignored as a valid metaphor for pastoral ministry. For these primary reasons, I have entered this research with a predisposition towards the importance of the father metaphor in pastoral ministry today.

Research Results

The findings of the interviews I conducted have been divided into two dominant trends, factors that serve as *Inhibitors* to the use of the father metaphor and those factors which serve as *Promoters* to the use of the father metaphor in pastoral ministry. Within each of these trends I have identified a total of five themes (two inhibitors and three promoters) which will serve as the primary focus of this research.¹⁰

Inhibitors of the Father Metaphor

Infrequent use of the father metaphor

With great consistency the pastors interviewed conceded that the shepherd metaphor was the most predominant metaphor that they employed in their current ministry settings. In most instances this claim was quickly clarified by the term “under-shepherd,” meaning that pastors identify themselves primarily through a lens of serving as an ‘under-shepherd’ to “The Great Shepherd.” One pastor explained the distinction this way,

In our tradition, particularly where I’ve been the pastor for the past 21 years, we emphasize Christ as being the chief shepherd and all the rest of us a shepherd under the one who is the chief shepherd. Of course you know not everyone makes the distinction, some would see us as a shepherd of the flock, but we only have one shepherd of the flock. I see myself as shepherding under.¹¹

¹⁰ See appendix B.

Another pastor noted, "I think of the church as a flock and me as an under shepherd under Jesus who is the chief shepherd." A third pastor echoed these same sentiments when he stated, "Probably the metaphor I am most familiar with is shepherd and, really, under shepherd. I really have a sense that Jesus is the shepherd; he is the pastor and the lead preacher-worshiper. So I am under him and really see myself as a shepherd under him."

What was particularly interesting to note was just how deeply imbedded the shepherd metaphor was in the minds of these pastors. So dominant was the shepherd metaphor itself that pastors frequently used additional shepherding metaphors throughout their interview to describe the work of pastoral ministry. In the natural flow of conversations pastors referred to their congregants frequently as "sheep" or "the flock." The act of preaching was consistently called "feeding the sheep," and discipline was spoken of as "protecting the sheep" from "wolves." When asked to describe the implications of emphasizing the shepherd metaphor one pastor said, "It means being sacrificial, you have to realize that your leadership role means you are being out there exposed with them to the elements, protective, nurturing, teaching, sometimes, you know, hitting them with sticks, 'hey get away from there.' There are, sort of, many aspects where you sometimes have to know you can't be gentle. Every now and then sometimes you feel like you have to yell 'stop, you're really close to a cliff'."¹²

From within this fairly small sample of pastors it was clear that there was a virtually unanimous acceptance and application of, not just the shepherd metaphor itself, but even supporting metaphors for pastors who think of themselves as under-shepherds.

¹¹ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 11, 2010. For the purpose of confidentiality, the names of pastors interviewed will remain undisclosed throughout this thesis

¹² Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 12, 2010.

In this way pastors not only appeared to share a common affinity towards the shepherd metaphor but also an almost universal understanding of the metaphor's implications.

Professional Boundaries

Another theme which emerged as an inhibitor to the father metaphor was what I termed "professional boundaries." Within this theme I identified three sub themes in areas labeled applicability to ministry, personal and cultural boundaries, and pastoral expectations.

In the course of the interviews pastors were able to identify several areas, or tasks, of their current ministry in which they did not see a connection with the role of the father. Top among their statements was in regards to administrative tasks such as handling the finances, managing staff members and running building campaigns. While most pastors did not clarify exactly why these tasks did not fit with the father metaphor, their responses indicated that responsibilities which were viewed as more "task oriented" rather than "relationship oriented" did not connect well to a relational metaphor such as father. One pastor described administrative duties as "corporate duties while the father metaphor was about community."¹³

When asked directly to describe what inhibits their use of the father metaphor more frequently, pastors offered their lengthiest and most concrete answers in the interview. In comparison to other questions they answered throughout the interview, responses to this question came the most quickly and with the greatest clarity for these pastors. Their verbal and social cues, including less time reflecting on answers, sitting forward, and greater eye contact, hinted that infrequent use of the father metaphor was not merely an oversight, but far more intentional for a wide-variety of reasons outlined in

¹³ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 16, 2010.

the themes described below.

One of the pastors' primary concerns in the employment of the father metaphor was the issue of age. Despite the fact that the pastors interviewed ranged in age from 27-60 years old each of them conveyed some concern about employing the father metaphor in a congregation in which there were members older than they. One pastor commented,

[the father metaphor] has not been a metaphor that has been very prevalent in my experience...primarily because of my age, but I think I'll get to more of that once I am a senior-aged pastor if the Lord lets me stay around a few more years. As I push towards retirement, I think I might experience more of that fatherly metaphor that you alluded to. There are a lot of senior-aged people in the Baptist church. I guess I just have not had a lot of experience.¹⁴

Another pastor confessed that he leaned on another metaphor entirely due to his age stating that he saw himself as "an older brother, because I started this church with my peers."¹⁵ Finally, a pastor commented that his employment of the father metaphor has diminished since taking on a senior pastor position because "most of the church is younger than I."¹⁶ He contrasted his present situation to his days spent ministering among the youth when the father metaphor was on the forefront of his mind daily, referring to himself in those earlier years of ministry as a "*loco parentis*."¹⁷

Second, several pastors mentioned that the tradition of their church made it difficult to employ the metaphor. One stated bluntly, "I don't know if in our tradition I've heard that metaphor used much. It's always the shepherd, the under-shepherd, or the leader of the community."¹⁸ For many, the employment of the father metaphor was

¹⁴ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 11, 2010.

¹⁵ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 29, 2010.

¹⁶ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 16, 2010.

¹⁷ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 16, 2010.

¹⁸ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 11, 2010.

difficult for them to employ for the simple reason that the metaphor is not frequently used within their tradition. In essence, their argument was that the sheer lack of familiarity with the metaphor caused them to consider it less frequently as a viable option.

In addition, each of the pastors that were interviewed represented a denomination or church that was distinctly Protestant. Several spoke about the number of former Roman Catholics from their congregation and the need to be sensitive to the ecclesiological implications and the historical association of the term father when used by professional clergy. This concern was coupled in many instances with a high regard for the scriptural prohibition delivered by Jesus to “call no man father.” As one pastor responded “I think scripturally, you might of mentioned it earlier, ‘call no one father, you only have one.’ I reckon as I reflect on it, that that would be where I come down.”¹⁹

Another voiced both the traditional and scriptural concerns when he said:

I think it is religious and cultural. The Catholic Church uses it and Jesus says call no man father, and I’m not sure what that means. I think they were employing it as more of a pastoral kind of role, a fatherly figure to feed, protect and provide for. Not that a priest owned the people or had that kind of authority in their lives, but I think that’s baggage in our spiritual culture. That’s what the Roman Catholics called their priests, and we’re not Roman Catholics. I think if I stood up and said, ‘Hi I’m father ---.’ People would think I was drunk. Some would get it. I think the cultural/spiritual baggage, but also scripture itself and trying to understand what Jesus meant by calling him father. I think those are the two.²⁰

An interesting trend which was revealed in the interviews was also an overarching concern that the father metaphor was somehow “arrogant” or “pejorative.” Again, the pastors were not asked to clarify why they felt this way towards the term but their responses implied that despite the fact that the CEO and shepherd metaphor both convey a sense of authority and headship, the term father, apparently, embodies these

¹⁹ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 11, 2010.

²⁰ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 23, 2010.

characteristics in such a way that it is viewed more negatively in contrast to other metaphors which represent the same traits and ideals. One of the pastors seemed to recognize this inconsistency in the process of answering the question when he said,

I'm much more comfortable saying that God has called me to be the shepherd. I guess maybe it feels less arrogant or authoritative if I just say God has called me to be a shepherd of this congregation. I feel ok saying shepherd. I guess it gets more pointed when you say I'm the shepherd and you are the sheep, because I think we all realize how dumb sheep are. And that's a real term of condescension or at least can be perceived as a condescending term when a pastor talks about his sheep.²¹

Despite this one comment, responses tended to reveal the overarching fear of pastors in employing the father metaphor and the perception of their congregations. One pastor responded to the question saying, "I think in the minds of some people it might be kind of pejorative to them. It might be putting myself on a pedestal."²² Another echoed this sentiment stating, "I think I've wondered if that's appropriate especially with staff, and I'm drawing a conclusion that I'm probably going beyond what I should. I'm not sure I should be fathering this person because it tends to be coddling as opposed to a father giving instruction."²³

Finally, a number of pastors spoke about the fact that their congregations are full of people who have had negative experiences with their father. As one pastor said succinctly, "the big obstacle is liberalism. You can't use the father metaphor because everyone has had bad fathers or mothers."²⁴ Another pastor spoke about the sensitivity required with the metaphor due to their outreach to orphans and their work with the

²¹ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., December, 12, 2010.

²² Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 19, 2010.

²³ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 23, 2010.

²⁴ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 19, 2010.

foster-care system when he said,

our ministry is really intertwined with orphan kids with dead beat or no fathers, it becomes a tricky metaphor, it brings up a lot, you can't avoid it, yet when you do bring it up you know you're stepping into something... you have to work through their disappointment of fathers and the idea that God would be a good father. You know there are people in our community who would have a really rough time with that. All kinds of abuse cases and all kinds of gender confusion stuff, usually pretty screwed up pasts with their parents and how they view them.²⁵

Another mentioned that many men in the congregations are new fathers themselves, struggling with their own sense of identity with that term and therefore feel more comfortable with a metaphor that is, perhaps, a bit less personal or intimidating. "Some are thinking 'I'm not very good at fathering' [so they] are much more comfortable with shepherd."²⁶

In addition to the relational struggles between congregants and their fathers, several pastors readily recognized that their own relationship with their fathers (or lack thereof) also played a critical role in shaping their view of the metaphor. The first words out of one pastor's mouth when asked what inhibited his use of the metaphor more frequently was a rather blunt and honest reply, "My own dad." He went on to explain "I love my dad, my dad is a pastor, but still today I have no relationship with him, even though I've tried and he's tried at times. I go through the difficult times of pastoring and know I would never talk to him about it."²⁷ Beyond this influence on his life he admitted somberly, "I really can't think of others outside of that." In this one pastor's own experience the absence of his own biological father had become the single most important barrier to his future use of the metaphor.

²⁵ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 12, 2010.

²⁶ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 12, 2010.

²⁷ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 16, 2010.

Another pastor, even while he did not fully embrace the father metaphor specifically, unknowingly conveyed the enormous influence of his father on his own ministry when he admitted, "I don't resist it, it's just when I think of my role as a pastor, the picture doesn't come to mind as a father of the church where they look to me in a parental sort of way. It's not my approach, I'm not sure why. When I think of my mom and dad I think of a CEO. I guess that's the reason I think of my leadership as visionary and CEO."²⁸

Inhibitor and Promoter of the Father Metaphor

Pastoral and Congregational Expectations

In the interviews there arose a series of statements and sentiments that unveiled a curious trend related to the father metaphor which was imbedded in the discrepancy between the expectations of the pastor and those of their congregants. Due to the often paradoxical nature of this trend I found it difficult to classify it exclusively as either an inhibitor or a promoter. In the end I have chosen to include it under each heading due to the fact that there appears to be a fairly consistent discrepancy between the expectations of pastors and their congregants regarding the use of the father metaphor. On the one hand pastors readily offer that their congregants often look to them as spiritual fathers while these same pastors generally distance themselves from the role by placing stricter boundaries on their responsibilities within the church. In this way pastoral expectations can be viewed as both an inhibitor and a promoter of the father metaphor.

When asked to discuss their explicit job description pastors readily offered that they were all charged in some measure with the primary responsibilities of teaching/preaching and casting vision. Following these two key responsibilities, less than

²⁸ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 23, 2010.

half mentioned prayer as one of their duties, while fewer still mentioned counseling and/or visitation. It was clear from these responses that there was little ambiguity in each pastor's mind about their primary duties to their congregations.

However, when asked to describe their *implicit* job descriptions pastors referenced functions of their pastoral role that deviated some from their own expectations of the role. While more subjective in nature, it was clear from the posture, tone, and body language of the pastors interviewed that their congregational expectations for them included aspects of pastoral ministry that were far less attractive to the pastors themselves. Several pastors spoke about an underlying fear that employing the father metaphor might cause an unhealthy reliance or dependability on the pastor. One pastor told me he feared that his fatherly care for a staff member could easily slip into "coddling," while another said,

The challenge with using that metaphor is taking it to the extreme. The father is one that many can become dependent upon and I don't want that to happen... God has privileged me to be a part of their life to make sure they don't have an affection toward me that is ungodly. That I don't become their idol. Sometimes when there has been an absence of a father they can place that towards someone else. I want to grow them up and make them mature believers so they respect me as pastor in their life but not dependent.²⁹

For this reason I have categorized the findings of this section of the data as both an inhibitor and a promoter of the father metaphor. While the pastoral perspective on congregational expectations readily points to the viability of the father metaphor, the reluctance and hesitancy of the pastors to willingly embrace these expectations appears to make it an inhibitor as well.

²⁹ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 19, 2010.

Promoters of the Father Metaphor

Congregant Expectations

When asked what congregants expected of them in their pastoral role, participants consistently placed their responsibility of “teaching” at the top of the list. However, as the pastors shared further it was clear that when they spoke of teaching from their congregation’s perspective, teaching often took the form of practical counseling, problem solving and availability, in addition to simply preaching during times of corporate worship.

While each of the pastors spoke candidly and honestly about their desires to be viewed as a leader and teacher, almost all of them confessed, to varying degrees, the discrepancy between their explicit job description and the underlying expectations of their followers. As hinted above, it was with some frustration that pastors lamented that while they would like their parishioners to look to them for spiritual guidance, in reality they were often sought after for practical advice. In particular, issues such as the management of finances and the meeting of practical needs rose to the top of the list. In general, pastors believe their congregations look to them to be “problem solvers” who are “efficient” in the management of facilities, staff, finances as well as leaders who can help them efficiently manage themselves.

Consistently they described experiences of being expected to “know everything” and to be “constantly available.” As one pastor described it, “their expectations might be, ‘he’s the person that’s going to be there at my every beck and call. He’s going to be there anytime I call, day and night.’”³⁰ Another described his experiences by telling me, “I’ve

³⁰ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 19, 2010.

had some people call me and ask me to baby sit their kids.”³¹ Still another admitted, with a rather embarrassed tone,

Well, it’s kind of funny, I’ve said before the three biggest questions I get the most are not how can I be saved, could you pray for my marriage, or could I come talk with you about my spiritual journey, I don’t get those as much as ... Can I get a job, do you know anyone who is renting a house, where can I get a car. I’m the information man in the community. That’s one aspect, I had one woman call me and leave a message saying ‘hey are you going to bring me some kindling wood?’³²

When I asked this pastor what kind of questions he thought those were, he smiled broadly and responded, “questions you ask your father.” Still another reflected on the previous days’ counseling sessions noting the frequency of a need to employ a fathering role towards his congregants when he told me,

Well, it’s funny, yesterday [the father metaphor] was actually kind of right on the forefront of my mind for a number of pretty intense kinds of meetings. I started with one with a girl who thinks she needs to get a divorce, and she probably does, and her husband is kind of a bum...he’s not a believer, not following Christ, and doing her an incredible disservice and I find myself in a father-like role. There is a man telling me that he thinks his job is too much...and I just asked fatherly type questions.³³

Coupled with the above observations pastors were then asked to describe what metaphors their congregants might use to describe them. While pastors freely admitted that the shepherd metaphor dominated their view of the pastoral role, when asked to identify what metaphor, or metaphors their congregations used to describe them they confessed that the most widely employed metaphor was not shepherd, but teacher. Interestingly, while only one pastor used the father metaphor to describe himself in the first interview question, one-third of the respondents acknowledged the term father when

³¹ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 12, 2010.

³² Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 23, 2010.

³³ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 12, 2010.

explaining which metaphors their congregations used to describe them. Additional responses included guidance counselor (a term used by two pastors), CEO, leader and friend.

Finally, pastors were asked to identify aspects of their pastoral role in which they could identify a clear applicability of the father metaphor. It was particularly clear in this section of the interview the obvious internal tension pastors have about the father metaphor. While pastors were able to quickly identify the areas in which the father metaphor would receive “push-back” or did not have clear application in their ministry, they were equally able to speak at length about the ways in which their position drew from the father metaphor in significant ways. The most commonly identified areas were in discipline, counseling/mentoring and teaching. In regards to the issue of discipline one pastor told me,

When I approach anyone here (for discipline), it is very much as a father. The most difficult thing that I had been through as a leader in all of ministry was when I had to let a staffer go this year. I wept, like a dad would, losing his kid. It very much informs how I approach somebody who is straying. So I approach them in a way that is compassionate, but firm, in a way that is loving but not condescending, in a way that recognizes that I too could be where they are, as dads that were once sons, to try to urge them to repentance.³⁴

Another pastor voiced a similar perspective when he said, “As I progress I want to pastor this church, really, the way I oversee my own children. I don’t hold anything back from them, I love them dearly, but I also say when you’re veering off I’m going to call you back, because I love you that much. So that is the role I am seeing myself in now. That image is shaping in me.”³⁵

While another pastor confessed that the father metaphor was “not something I

³⁴ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 16, 2010.

³⁵ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 19, 2010.

have embraced” he also recognized at the same time that, “I am beginning to see that’s more my role now.” He went on to describe the difference between the kind of exhorting he does from the pulpit and the necessity of speaking into individual lives about their sin on a more intimate level:

I see in scripture Paul had the ability to confront if necessary, and he had the same affection toward Timothy and his entourage of people that went with him. I really see that his relationship was much more than a teacher. ‘I’m going to speak into your life and confront issues I see and I’m not going to shy away from that’. It’s easy for me to minister and deal with issues from the pulpit, it’s easy for me to be cutting and speak a very strong word. Where I am growing is pulling a guy to the side and confronting those issues, “hey brother come here, I need to talk to you...” The impact of those one on one words are, in many ways, more powerful than the event setting where you can question whether or not ‘is he talking to me?’ That’s the role of a father and that’s the role of love and to me that is the highest form of love to be able to be misunderstood.³⁶

In regards to counseling and mentoring, a pastor responded that he acted as a father in the process of visitation,

Going to see members when they have problems (sickness, death) just when they call or have a crisis. They come to me. It’s a kind of respect that a child would give a parent. You come, and members are often times in need of somebody to listen to them, somebody to help them clarify options that are available (we try not to tell people what to do) but you know, lay out the options that are available to them. [I] go and see them if they are in trouble, [I] help them get out of trouble.³⁷

Expanding this sentiment, one pastor spoke about his availability to parishioners as a kind of faithfulness that was similar to marital faithfulness.

Faithfulness; being faithful to a spouse, that’s what is important to our parishioners, if they see that I am faithful to God, then they will believe that I will be faithful to them. So the father metaphor- seeing the pastor as someone they can come to whatever problems or issues that can be helped. Even if the pastor doesn’t have the resources in and of himself, but the pastor knows where to go, where to refer them.³⁸

³⁶ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 19, 2010.

³⁷ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 19, 2010.

Likewise, pastors viewed themselves as fathers in their role as a teacher. Drawing on the shepherding metaphor one pastor spoke of the importance of his duty of “feeding” his people “with the word of God, as a father would feed his family, in a spiritual sense.” While other pastors mentioned their formal role of teaching others talked about the informal mentoring and modeling they perform for their congregations. One pastor responded,

I have my own small group with a group of people who have their own small groups and it's for the purpose of pursuing and building. It takes a little time to build that type of intimacy in a relationship, and that is what is defining our ministry. Because people have to have a license for you to speak into their lives, so when they honor the pastoral role that I feel like I'm moving into now, he's going to father me. It is an anointing from God, something bestowed upon me, to operate in that role.³⁹

Finally, in a highly emotional tone, one pastor shared his overarching sense of responsibility he had for his congregation when he said,

I embrace bearing the responsibility of the Body of the family, ultimately I know it's Jesus' Church and I try to lean in to Him and try not to bear the full weight, because it's not my Church. But as the lead pastor I've been given responsibility to shoulder the weight of things that go on here. I do embrace that responsibility, I do my best to lead and shepherd well. Which I think is the responsibility of the dad towards his family to lead them to Jesus to provide for and so whatever that means for our church family: spiritual provision, giving counsel and wisdom, making sure our households in order financially, that we are not spending wildly, being frugal and honoring Christ with our finances. Things that I say I love these people as my own children and I want to care for them so if that means I have to go out in the middle of the night because someone has an issue or emergency, I'll be there... as much as I can.⁴⁰

Conclusion

In closing I want to share one final story. In one interview, I took the opportunity to ask a pastor a question I had not asked any of the others. After our official interview

³⁸ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 11, 2010.

³⁹ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 29, 2010.

⁴⁰ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 11, 2010.

had ended I asked the pastor why he thought there was an overwhelming preference for the shepherd metaphor in pastoral ministry. Candidly, he responded that he believed pastors liked “the difference in type between shepherd and sheep.” In essence, he shared that he believed pastors intuitively understood that sheep cannot ever become shepherds and that there was a subtle security in the fact, from this pastor’s perspective, that the shepherd/sheep metaphor afforded pastors a certain kind of boundary between them and their followers that the humanity of the father metaphor had the potential to remove.

He went on to tell me, “I think ‘father’ strikes at the heart deeper than shepherd. Shepherd, you’re thinking of sheep [but] father is a human term. I think the father elicits a tenderness that maybe a shepherd image would not. We don’t raise sheep around these parts, but we do rear children. Every one of the elders is a father or mother. That’s really where we live. I think that there is tenderness in the sense of providing for our children and *reclaiming that is probably the lost language of the church.*”⁴¹

⁴¹ Interview by author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 23, 2010, (emphasis mine).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION AND MINISTRY IMPLICATIONS

Author and pastor, Kevin Miller, once reflected that “Pastors seem lost, with little guidance on the core question: *what is my role?*”¹ My own career in pastoral ministry combined with my interactions with other pastors has caused me to agree with Miller’s assessment and has motivated me to assist my colleagues in their journey. Towards this end the purpose of this work has been to suggest that pastors consider the use of additional pastoral metaphors that can further define the mysterious work pastors find themselves called to. In light of the interviews conducted for this work, it appears that the predominance of the shepherd metaphor in pastoral ministry could benefit from the support of additional metaphors in order to further clarify and highlight additional aspects of ministry not adequately addressed by a single metaphor.

As was noted in chapter four, the father metaphor clearly presents the church with obstacles as well as great opportunities. Given the perspectives shared in previous chapters there appears to be a genuine for pastors to gain greater clarity on their role and identity amidst a changing culture. According to my personal research many pastors have little clarity in regards to their pastoral role outside of a single guiding metaphor and their call to preach. Most, if not all, voiced sentiments such as “I haven’t given a lot of thought to that” which demonstrated that their role and identity are not something that they reflect on often, especially when it came to attempting to discern and define pastoral expectations of their congregants.

As was stated earlier, pastoral work today is saturated with a number of

¹ Kevin A. Miller, “From Relevant Dude to Spiritual Father,” *Leadership Journal*, Summer 2011, 46.

leadership metaphors, each one communicating, at times, conflicting values and implications for praxis. And yet, I have become increasingly convinced that pastoral work cannot be fully defined by any single metaphor and that in the same way that God chooses to use a variety of metaphors to describe Himself (father, mother, gardener, potter) and his Church (body, family, temple), so too pastors would be well served by the use of additional metaphors to inform their unique calling. With this in view it has been my desire to demonstrate the potential value of the inclusion of the father metaphor in pastoral ministry for the unique support it can lend to pastoral metaphors already in use by pastors today:

Due to the ambiguous nature of the term father in America today, whether employed by biological or spiritual fathers, my intent is to work with the data in order to develop and present pastors with a handful of practical applications that will enable them to begin to frame how the father metaphor may be employed by male pastors in America during the twenty-first century and beyond. Given the responses collected in the interview, combined with biblical and theological research, the conclusion of my work includes now the discussion of three possible areas in which pastors can begin to embody the father metaphor in the life of their church in simple and practical ways. The three areas include the work of serving their congregations by giving them *identity*, *instruction*, and a life worthy of *imitation*.

My rationale for creating and presenting these specific suggestions is twofold. First, following my research it became clear that there is a great need today to establish a common language for the church by which it can speak about the father metaphor with a mutual understanding of the term being employed. Just as the meaning and definition of

the term father (biological) has become increasingly elusive within our larger society,² the Church too is in great need of clarification and consensus about the use of the father metaphor. Similar to the way in which numerous pastors and scholars have spent time framing other metaphors for the church, so too, there is a great need for a common basis of understanding for the father metaphor today. These practical suggestions form a starting point for the conversation.

My second intention for defining this metaphor in the following areas stems from my conviction that metaphors can, and do, play a central role in the life of ministry. A pastor who considers himself as a CEO of a business will, in fact, lead his congregation in fundamentally different ways than one who considers himself as a shepherd of a flock of sheep. This is due, at least in part, to the highly subjective nature of metaphors themselves; figures of speech described as “mobile,” words that “wax and wane.”³ Without proper guidance and framework the application of many metaphors is left to the listener. Because metaphors communicate at a level distinct from literal speech, they have the ability to inform and guide the motivations as well as the praxis of pastors. Their non-literal nature allows them to be more fluid, moving into the realm of the subconscious instead of merely remaining on the surface.⁴ Therefore it is insufficient to merely indicate that the father metaphor is necessary today in the Church without also offering specific and practical ways in which it can be employed. Helping pastors to understand the practical application of the father metaphor is as necessary as presenting a case for its

² Janet Martin Soskice, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender and Religious Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 68.

³ Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 68.

⁴ Paul Rosenblatt, *Metaphors of Family Systems Theory: Towards New Construction* (New York: Guilford Press, 1994), 11-13.

relevance in our modern world.

With this said, I believe it is also essential to highlight the fact that the application I suggest here is *not* the only way to apply the father metaphor. To reiterate, I am merely presenting several practical applications as a means of beginning to invite the church into a necessary dialogue about pastoral metaphors and to begin to use more formal language to discern how more consistent employment of the father metaphor in particular could contribute to pastoral ministry into the twenty-first century.

Undoubtedly, there are a number of additional areas in pastoral ministry that the father metaphor contributes to. While I have chosen to focus on the areas of instruction, imitation, and identity, one may ask why I have not also included a discussion of creation or authority. After all, creation is a concept that Paul himself embraced when he told the church he “begot” them (1 Cor 4:15). And yet, when I conducted my research, the pastors I interviewed failed to ever mention creation or procreation as an aspect of their work in pastoral ministry. Further research would need to be conducted to understand this trend more fully; however, at this juncture it is clear that creation is not an aspect of ministry that pastors recognize as vital in their role among congregants.

In regards to the topic of authority, I discovered in my interviews that, particularly when discussing the father metaphor, pastors believed that it presented a great risk of being perceived as “pejorative,” “arrogant,” and “authoritarian.”⁵ While every pastoral metaphor conveys some sense of authority (i.e. shepherd over sheep, CEO over corporation), the father metaphor appears to require greater care in its employment because it is a far more intimate metaphor which draws upon the closest of human relations, the family. Fear of being perceived as authoritarian in some way was one of the

⁵ For a more comprehensive discussion of these findings see chapter 4 of this thesis.

most common apprehensions pastors demonstrated in regards to the father metaphor. For this reason I have chosen not to include it as an initial area to explore the metaphor in.

To reiterate, I am not suggesting that procreation and/or authority are irrelevant topics in regards to the father metaphor. In fact, I would argue that further exploration of either would yield significant contributions to an ongoing discussion. However, due to the date revealed in my research, I have chosen to focus exclusively on those areas of pastoral ministry which I believe coincide rather naturally with the kind of work that a majority of pastors are already engaged in.

Due to the fact that this thesis is designed to serve as an introductory, qualitative study of the father metaphor I have chosen to spend significant time discerning ways in which its application could be most readily accessible to the largest number of pastors. Due in large part to the findings of the research I have conducted, I have become convinced that a large percentage of pastors and theologians view the father metaphor with a mixture of apprehension and suspicion. In light of this, I am inviting pastors to apply the father metaphor initially in the areas of pastoral ministry where they themselves have already identified the greatest congruence, the areas of identity, instruction and imitation.

For further clarification, as I outline these three areas below, I want to refrain from suggesting that they fit neatly into a set of well-defined tasks as much as they serve as suggestions for a way of "being." Moreover, the areas themselves often overlap, forming a holistic paradigm which undergirds the totality of pastoral work. For instance, the work of identity formation can be accomplished through both instruction and imitation; instruction can occur through formal avenues of preaching and teaching as well

as through less formal instances of modeling, and imitation may be occurring constantly through both instruction as well as identity shaping. In the end pastors may read this work and discover additional areas where the father metaphor is more applicable, or ways in which its use can have a greater impact on pastoral vocation. If I have succeeded in merely igniting an interest in the father metaphor, this work will serve its purpose. Towards that end I propose the following suggestions as ways to begin to practically employ the father metaphor in pastoral ministry into the twenty-first century, and beyond.

Identity

The first area I want to propose regarding the father metaphor is what I refer to as *identity*. Just as biological fathers serve to root their families within a particular people-group, in a particular time, with a particular story, so pastors have an equal opportunity to remind their spiritual families of their own heritage in the unfolding story of God. As Nihls Dahl once wrote, “The first obligation of the apostle vis-à-vis the community – beyond founding it – is to make the faithful remember what they have received and already know – or should know.”⁶ This is accomplished through a variety of means, including both formal and informal avenues. The two primary means mentioned by the pastors I interviewed where identity formation seems to occur most frequently with pastors is in the tasks of vision-casting and preaching. Through both, the pastor fulfills his or her vocation “to continuously make connections between the human story and the divine story.”⁷

⁶ Nihls Dahl, “Anamnesis: Memory and Commemoration in Early Christianity,” *Studia Theologica*, 1, 1947, 75.

⁷ Henri Nouwen, *The Living Reminder: Service and Prayer in Memory of Jesus Christ* (New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1977), 24.

While the role of preaching and teaching will be discussed more fully when the area of instruction is discussed, suffice it to say here that one of the principal goals of preaching is to continually remind people who they are in light of their Creator, the person and work of Jesus Christ, and the indwelling Spirit. Even a cursory glance at Paul's epistles to the young churches he planted reveals that one of his primary, pastoral functions was to shape the identity of the community by teaching and reminding them about their new identity in Christ. At least one scholar has described Paul as an "entrepreneur of identity,"⁸ while Klyne Snodgrass states emphatically, "If anyone focused on identity it was Paul."⁹ For example, in the second chapter of his letter to the Ephesians Paul strings together a lengthy discourse on the new identity the Ephesians¹⁰ possess in the life and ministry of Jesus. He reminds his congregation:

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins...But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved, and raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus...For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith...For we are God's workmanship...now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ...through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household...in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit (Eph 2:1, 4, 5, 8, 10, 13, 18, 19, 22).

Here Paul's language indicates a desire to establish the identity of his congregation as a people whose rebirth into a new community grants them new eyes by

⁸ Philip Esler, *Conflict and Identity in Romans: The Social Setting of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 109.

⁹ Klyne R. Snodgrass, "Paul's Focus on Identity," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Vol. 168 Num. 671 July-September 2011, 259.

¹⁰ The author is aware that there is serious debate about who the actual recipients of the letter of Ephesians were intended to be. However, a full discussion of this debate is outside of the scope of this paper.

which they are to view themselves. Klyne states that the work of modern pastors should be no different, “those in pastoral roles should see themselves as entrepreneurs of identity. Pastors seek to help people understand who God says they are and how they should live; *pastors communicate identity*. This is the reason a hermeneutics of identity is so important. It is a direct path to understanding who God says humans are to be.”¹¹

With this in view, a striking feature of interviews I conducted with pastors was that over half of them mentioned that the father metaphor would be received as “pejorative” and “arrogant.” This result is particularly interesting because we find throughout Paul’s epistles his frequent, and unapologetic, use of the terms “child” and “children” when referring to his churches (Cf. Rom 8:16,17, 21; 1 Cor 4:14, 14:20; 2 Cor 6:13; 12:14; Gal 4:19; Eph 5:1, 8; 1 Thess 2:7, 11). In contrast to the pastors who mentioned the “pejorative” and/or “arrogant” nature of father/child metaphors, Paul appears to employ the term with little fear that his words will bring about such a backlash. Rather than accusing Paul of holding a new vision for authoritative leadership in the church,¹² one can also argue that Paul’s freedom in using the term stemmed from a mutual understanding between himself and his congregations regarding the very nature of their relationship.¹³ Indeed, nearly every pastoral metaphor possesses a support of hierarchical structures in some form. Shepherds oversee their sheep, CEO’s sit at the head of the organizational chart, potters work the clay, and gardeners tend to the plants. Discerning why the father metaphor seems to be particularly problematic for pastors

¹¹ Snodgrass, “Paul’s Focus on Identity,” (emphasis mine).

¹² Joseph Hellerman, *The Ancient Church as Family*, 101-103.

¹³ It is also important to note that the simple English word “child” does not fully capture the depth of meaning intended by the four Greek words *hyios*, *teknion*, *teknos*, *nepios*, and *paidon* used throughout the New Testament which all contained biological as well as spiritual implications. For a fuller discussion see David W. Bennett, *Metaphors of Ministry* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1993), 76-80.

when it comes to the issue of authority is beyond the scope of this single study, but suffice it to say at this point that the thorny issue of the question of authority is not unique to the father metaphor.

As was demonstrated earlier in this work, fathers in the first century were afforded significant power and influence over their entire household. In such a world it was fitting for apostles like Paul to view their leadership over the “family of God” through metaphors that were consistent with that reality. Similar to the ways that participants involved in my study used additional metaphors to reinforce the view of themselves as shepherds over a flock (i.e. “feeding the sheep,” “protecting from wolves,” etc...), Paul extends the familial metaphor to a natural conclusion. If the congregation is the family, what role does the pastor play? In Paul’s mind the natural answer appears to be, in some instances among his pastoral letters, the father.

Furthermore, Paul’s use of the term “child” or “children” may have been accomplishing more than merely granting positional identity, but as witnessed in the Ephesians passage earlier, it may well have also been continuing to shape each person’s spiritual identity as well. As spiritually “re-born” individuals the term “child” is a fitting metaphor to describe someone young in the faith; just beginning their spiritual life. As their spiritual father, Paul’s employment of paternal imagery may not suggest his authority as much as it does his spiritual age and his obligation. As their spiritual father Paul is one who has gone before them and is now turning his gaze towards those that he has helped “birth” into a new life, in order that he might provide them with direction and identity. His language may strongly suggest that Paul understood his obligation to remind his followers that something entirely new has begun. The old way of life is left behind

and an entirely new journey has started. If this is true it seems appropriate to ask how a person who becomes “born again,” once again returning to the position of a child in need of a spiritual father, is to be guided.

Study participants seemed to intuitively embrace this same sense of obligation for their congregations, and it is at this point that one finds a distinct contribution the father metaphor makes in pastoral ministry. While nearly every pastoral metaphor affords an element of responsibility on the part of the leader, the level of responsibility differs. For example, one pastor I interviewed who referred to himself as a CEO noted, “If you asked [the church] if they view this as a close knit family or as a well-oiled machine I think they would say well-oiled machine that really loves each other. So I think they feel a safe family connection but I don’t think they see me as dad, they see it as a business with roles to fill.” Employing corporate imagery, the overarching responsibility of a CEO to his/her company is primarily one of good management, product development, and fiscal responsibility. The inclusion of the father metaphor could potentially offer pastors the additional obligation of caring for their parishioners holistically through pastoral counseling and spiritual direction instead of merely holding them accountable to measurable outcomes.

In comparison to the CEO, the participants I spoke with stated that the primary implications of the shepherd metaphor for them are “leading,” “attending” and “feeding.” Inclusion of the father metaphor into pastoral ministry complements these metaphors by highlighting the unique responsibilities of a pastor who, in addition to these responsibilities; brings their followers into spiritual maturity that allows them to become less dependent on their leader. As one pastor told me, “my role is to work myself out of a

job.”¹⁴

This statement clarifies what is meant by the unique role pastors play in identity formation in at least two important ways. First, in ways distinct from any other metaphor the father metaphor adopts the real life experience of parents seeking to produce healthy, independent children who grow increasingly less dependent on their parents for their spiritual, physical and emotional needs as they mature. In the same way that CEOs empower their employees to experience increasing levels of professional achievement, the father metaphor implies an interest in personal development while fully embracing the doctrine of the “priest-hood of all believers” as pastors recognize their calling to shape their parishioners into an entire congregation of lay pastors who can genuinely care for one another. This is accomplished through the use of language they can easily understand because most of them has experienced what it means to be part of a family.

Second, while CEOs work with products and shepherds with sheep, the father works with humans and the term is, according to one participant, “a human term.” The difference, this pastor noted, was that “the father elicits a tenderness that maybe a shepherd image would not.” There is a sense in which familiar metaphors suggest a more intimate connection between pastor and congregants. It addresses their humanity in ways that are not fully captured by corporate or agrarian metaphors, and it forces pastors, like biological fathers, to adopt a humble posture when recognizing the truth voiced in Dennis Caraher’s song “Sweet Summer Days” when he sings,

We were once our children
Too soon they will be us.
All they ask, a simple task;
“Remember how it was.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Interview by the author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 11, 2010.

As spiritual family members, congregants become aware of their true identity not from their father, but from their communities as well. Snodgrass describes the phenomenon this way, "Identity is something assigned to us by others and something we assign to ourselves in response to a community's assignment of identity to us, an interaction of self description and communal description."¹⁶ When a pastor thinks of him or herself as a shepherd his or her congregation recognizes themselves as a flock. When a pastor uses the CEO metaphor his or her congregants views themselves as employees or products. When the pastor is seen as a gardener, the congregants understand themselves to be various forms of botany. Regardless of the metaphor in use, the pastor has certain responsibilities which naturally flow from the implications of that metaphor which, in turn, communicate something about the identity of their followers. When a pastor thinks of himself as a father his congregation has the potential of taking on the identity of a family.

This can occur because when a pastor embraces the father metaphor, it has the power to fundamentally change the way he views his role, his congregation's role towards one another and, in turn, the way the congregants view themselves. Like involved fathers in the lives of their children, when a pastor willingly embraces his or her sense of responsibility to his or her congregation he or she conveys a sense of ownership that could possibly aid in the development of a healthier and more trusting congregation who is more unified in their communal sense of identity. In the quote below from one pastor I have highlighted his repeated use of the word *responsibility* when describing his

¹⁵ Dennis Caraher "Sweet Summer Days," *Radio Boy*, Radioboy Music, 2005.

¹⁶ Klyne R. Snodgrass, "Introduction to a Hermeneutic of Identity," *Bibliotheca Sacra* Vol. 168 Num. 669 (January – March 2011), 13.

relationship with his congregation. Of great importance is the way in which this particular pastor makes explicit comparisons between his responsibilities as a biological father and his role as a pastor to his spiritual family.

I embrace bearing the *responsibility* of the Body of the family, ultimately I know its Jesus' Church and I try to lean into Him and try not to bear the full weight, because it's not my Church. But as the lead pastor I've been given *responsibility* to shoulder the weight of things that go on here. I do embrace that *responsibility*, I do my best to lead and shepherd well. *Which I think is the responsibility of the dad towards his family*, to lead them to Jesus, to provide for them, and so whatever that means for our church family: spiritual provision, giving counsel and wisdom, making sure our households in order financially, that we are not spending wildly, being frugal and honoring Christ with our finances; things that I say. *I love these people as my own children* and I want to care for them so if that means I have to go out in the middle of the night because someone has an issue or emergency, I'll be there... as much as I can.¹⁷

The father metaphor seems to support, in unique ways, a sense of permanence and commitment that allows the vocation of pastoring to be seen as more than merely a job. Like biological fathering, a pastor's sense of responsibility to his spiritual family assists him in his ability to transcend the ever present temptation to simply quit and find different employment, or, to push the metaphor further, to leave and find a different family. One pastor told me that when he considered taking another church it made him feel "like I was cheating on my wife." Another pastor shared similar thoughts when he told me, "There is accountability to the Lord, but also to people. I can't just come and go and do what I want but I have a responsibility for feeding, tending, caring. I want to be very careful as I move among people that I am not here to climb a ladder on the backs of my people but I'm here to come along side of them."¹⁸ Perhaps, just as parents'

¹⁷ Interview by the author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 11, 2010.

¹⁸ Interview by the author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 19, 2010.

commitment and faithfulness to one another produces healthier, less anxious children,¹⁹ a pastors' sense of responsibility to their spiritual family could possibly aid in a healthier sense of identity for each of their spiritual children.

These statements also further reveal an important dynamic at play in pastoral ministry by which pastors readily recognize the complexity in their roles. The sentiments of many of the pastors I interviewed highlight the fact that the pastor is a steward of Jesus' Church; simultaneously a shepherd over the congregation and an under-shepherd of Jesus, the ultimate leader of the congregation. Pastors find themselves in unique leadership roles by which they are a leader *and* a follower, teacher *and* disciple. In the same way, employing the father metaphor demands the ability to embrace the biblical truth that each pastor is both a father *and* a son. Embracing this fundamental truth accomplishes two goals for pastors. On the one hand pastors are reminded of their own true identity while simultaneously shaping the identity of their congregants by reminding them that, pastors, too, are people under authority and in process. Pastors are not unapproachable, professional Christians who have "arrived" spiritually; they are also sons and children for whom a gracious Father has taken responsibility. Secondly, by consistently living out of both metaphors (father and son) pastors are better equipped to lead with equal parts submission and authority and thereby shield themselves and their congregants from the same fears verbalized by pastors I interviewed; that they would be viewed as "patronizing," "authoritarian," or "pejorative" by employing the father metaphor.

¹⁹ For a comprehensive explanation of the relationship between family commitment and child anxiety see John Bowlby, *Separation: Anxiety and Anger* (London, UK: The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, 1976) or Barbara Dafoe Whitehead, *The Divorce Culture: Rethinking Our Commitment to Marriage and Family* (United States: Vintage Books, 1998).

When Jesus was preparing his disciples to take positions of authority and leadership in the early church, his language frequently highlighted this same truth. David Bennett notes that “Jesus places far more emphasis on their responsibility to God’s authority, than on the authority which they themselves will exercise. There is far more instruction about the role of following than about the role of leading.”²⁰

This same dynamic paves the way to discuss the role of vision casting as another avenue through which pastors shape the identity of their congregants. While some participants echoed the sentiments of one pastor who described himself as “an inspirer, a motivator, the guy that sees a mountain and says let’s go climb it,” others readily recognized that the pastors role in the process of vision casting is fundamentally about receiving a vision rather than merely creating one. As one pastor described the process, the first task of vision casting is to ask “where [is] God taking us...what is God charging us to do and how are we going to get that done” as well as “Making sure that we’re on board with Jesus, that He’s our senior pastor and that were on the mission that He’s given us.”

As pastors seek to guide their congregations into the future, they do so as one who has first sat under counsel themselves and is sharing a vision received. While few pastors I interviewed spoke explicitly about vision casting in terms of communal identity, a fundamental aspect of creating vision and mission statements is the process of discerning exactly who the congregation is called to *be*. Through the procedure of identifying strengths and weakness, values and passions, a pastor works with his congregation to discern the uniqueness of the people God has gathered together. Indeed, distinct from a

²⁰ David Bennett, *Metaphors of Ministry: Biblical Images for Leaders and Followers* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 62.

strategic plan, the vision of a congregation has more to do with answering the question “who are we called to be?” rather than “what are we going to do?” When viewed in this manner, vision statements become a means of identity formation. As one author states it, “the vision in congregations needs to be about more than the results a group of people want to create. It also has to reflect our discernment of the will of God for our future.”²¹

Instruction

The second area of the father metaphor is the area of instruction which includes any area of ministry in which pastors speak into the lives of their congregants in order to shape their values, expand their knowledge or challenge their behavior. Beyond the unanimous agreement by participants that instruction is accomplished primarily through their preaching, it also encompasses less formal times of teaching including mentoring, counseling, giving advice and issuing discipline. While the central importance of preaching is not disputed, few participants agreed that this encompassed the totality of their work in the area of instruction. In the same way that biological fathers instruct their children through both formal and informal opportunities, the role of the pastor as an instructor takes many forms.

Regarding instruction, what first comes to mind unanimously for participants (and perhaps many congregants as well) is the intentional times of formal teaching that pastors engage in every week. Through Sunday morning worship services, to Sunday evening discussions, Sunday school classes, new member classes, small group leadership and funerals and weddings, pastors find numerous opportunities to explicitly shape the beliefs, values and knowledge of their parishioners through corporate times of preaching

²¹ Gilbert R. Rendle, *Leading Change in the Congregation* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, Inc., 1998), 18.

and teaching. The acceptance of this aspect of pastoral ministry was universally affirmed by every pastor I interviewed. Pastors are teachers, and this form of public, explicit, teaching should not in any way be undermined or diminished by the employment of any metaphor. The proclamation of the gospel forms the central call of Christ's ministry to a lost world, and the proper preaching of God's word should remain a foremost activity of every pastor, in the same way that this is a foremost activity of an involved, responsible father.

However, one fundamental contribution of the father metaphor in pastoral ministry is the way in which it also expands, and further defines, what it means for a pastor to be a "teacher." Beyond congregational expectations that the pastor preach and teach publicly, nearly every pastor I interviewed also spoke at length about the fact that what they often found themselves engaged in, and what their congregants asked of them implicitly, was teaching *outside* of the pulpit that addressed the practical questions of life. While the lion's share of instruction often occurs in public spaces between parishioner and pastor, an equally important type of instruction needs to be occurring in one-on-one settings outside of these public times as well.

Like biological fathers, pastors find that in order to pastor faithfully, they need to be involved in the process of instructing their congregations beyond Sunday morning, throughout the regular course of the week. Just as fathers continue to be fathers long after they return home from their work of physically providing for their families, pastors engage in instruction outside of the sanctuary between Sundays in a coffee shop, during a conversation over breakfast, in a living room following a crisis, in the foyer of a church, at a little league game or a fourth of July picnic. In the words of Eugene Peterson, pastors

are called to work their trade “in the middle of the traffic.” He writes,

Sundays are important - celebrative and essential. The first day defines and energizes our lives by means of our Lord’s resurrection and gives a resurrection shape to the week. But the six days in between Sundays are just as important, if not celebrative, for they are the days to which the resurrection shape is given. Since most pastoral work takes place on the six days, an equivalent attention must be given to them, practicing the art of prayer in the middle of traffic.²²

While it became clear among the participants I interviewed that this type of informal instruction sometimes exhausts them, they also recognized that their parishioners are looking to them as far more than walking commentaries or bible scholars. Kevin Miller has recently noticed this same shift in his own congregation when he writes that “they seem to want me firm, mature and relationally present. In short, they want me to be a spiritual father. For some, I’m the Christian dad they never had. For others I’m the father figure who’s now here.”²³

In the course of conversations about congregant expectations, pastors willingly conceded this same point, that their parishioners viewed them frequently as metaphorical fathers. This was certainly one of the most important findings of this study, and one that points to a growing need in the world today by which a new generation of church members are seeking a father figure who intentionally steps into the messiness of their lives and volunteers to walk beside them.

Some pastors who answered the question with an explicit reference to the father metaphor; others wove the metaphor into their description of congregational expectations, expectations which revealed the need for pastors to step out of the pulpit from time to time to engage in counseling, informal teaching, giving practical advice and

²² Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*, 54.

²³ Kevin Miller, “From Relevant Dude to Spiritual Father,” 46.

spiritual formation. One pastor reflected on the most common issues he faces in his congregation by presenting me with a conversation he recently had with a parishioner. He concluded the illustration with his own sense that in many of his counseling sessions congregants are looking for a father figure.

“I don’t know what I’m doing with my life. Can you help me?” We have to talk through why you’re 27 and still at home. Why are you afraid to jump into the real world? And so I think a lot of people would see me or see a pastor as counselor. I do think some people see a sort of father-figure there; maybe regardless if they have a good relationship with their real father or not.”²⁴

Another pastor was also able to identify the connection between practical advice and the father metaphor when he stated, “They see me as someone who’s got some knowledge, authority and wisdom and they’re seeking advice as they would from their dad.”²⁵ Finally, a third pastor captured well the apparent dichotomy between pastoral and congregational expectations when he shared with me the following story,

A young man that came that had just gotten out of prison, he wanted to call me papa, but I didn’t want to be called that. He came from a fatherless home; he wanted to make an attachment to me and an endearment to me. “This is the one that has an oversight in my life, the one I want to speak into my life.” He came up with that term; I never refer to myself as “father” or “papa.”²⁶

For many pastors another aspect of instruction includes not just counseling and guidance, but also the less favorable form of instruction known as church discipline. While several pastors discussed their role as a “protector of the flock,” many used these terms to describe their sense of responsibility to ensure that their parishioners were receiving correct doctrine, primarily through preaching. Yet, there were an equal number

²⁴ Interview by the author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 12, 2010.

²⁵ Interview by the author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 23, 2010.

²⁶ Interview by the author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 19, 2010.

of pastors who also spoke freely about their unique calling to speak directly into the personal lives of congregants who were struggling with a variety of sins. What was particularly interesting to note was the shift in metaphorical language that was employed in the course of these conversations. When speaking about doctrinal purity pastors referred to their roles as “shepherds” who needed to “protect the sheep.” However, when pastors spoke about personal accountability in the lives of congregants the more common metaphors of choice were “father” and “children.” As cited earlier, one pastor described the dynamic this way,

When I approach anyone here, it is very much as a father. The most difficult thing that I have been through as a leader in all of ministry [is when] I had to let a staffer go this year. I wept like a dad would losing his kid. It very much informs how I approach somebody who is straying. So I approach them in a way that is compassionate, but firm, in a way that is loving but not condescending, in a way that recognizes that I too could be where they are, as all dads that were once sons.²⁷

Another pastor used the father metaphor when speaking about his advice being disregarded. “I’ve had some men and women who want answers but want to hear what they want to hear. So I give them my best, most Holy Spirit dependent, advice that I can on issues, and I watch them completely disregard that. And it’s painful and I don’t know if it’s because they don’t see me as a father-type-figure or if they just don’t respect anyone’s opinion.” His sentiments support the reflections of Kevin Miller who points out that the father metaphor presents pastors with a burden for their spiritual family that requires of them to support their congregants regardless of the outcome. He writes, “What helps me is to realize that though people resent church discipline and push back against it, usually deep down they know they need it. And even if they don’t like it (or

²⁷ Interview by the author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 16, 2010.

me), to be a spiritual father means I must take the risk and plunge into bringing guidance and loving discipline to my spiritual children.”²⁸

I conclude this discussion of the area of instruction with a lengthy response from one pastor who spoke for some time about his changing perceptions of pastoral ministry. Early on in his ministry he confessed that he viewed himself primarily as a teacher from the pulpit, one who guides and instructs, primarily, during Sunday morning worship. Yet, in recent years, he has come to recognize the need for himself to engage his congregants at a much deeper and more personal level. In this reflection on discipline, a pastor who had used the word “shepherd” almost exclusively throughout the interview, suddenly switched to the father metaphor to describe his evolving sense of pastoral ministry in the area of instruction. In essence, his shifting idea of what it means to be a minister of the “sacrament and the word.”

I see in scripture Paul had the ability to confront if necessary. He had the same affection toward Timothy and others; his entourage of people that went with him. I really see that his relationship was much more than a teacher. “I’m going to speak into your life and confront issues I see and I’m not going to shy away from that.” I’m seeing that’s more my role. It’s easy for me to minister and deal with issues from the pulpit, it’s easy for me to be cutting and speak a very strong word. Where I am growing is pulling a guy to the side and confronting those issues, “hey brother come here, I need to talk to you...” The impact of those one-on-one words and in many ways more powerful than the event setting, you can’t question whether or not “is he talking to me?” *That’s the role of a father* and that’s the role of love and to me that is the highest form of love to be able to be misunderstood. When you read through the book of Proverbs there is much value in that role of confrontation. *As I progress I want to pastor this church really the way I oversee my own children.* I don’t hold anything back from them, I love them dearly, but I also say when you’re veering off I’m going to call you back, because I love you that much. So that is the role I am seeing myself in now. That image is shaping in me.²⁹

²⁸ Kevin Miller, “From Relevant Dude to Spiritual Father,” 48.

²⁹ Interview by the author, digital recording, Montreat, NC., November 19, 2010 (emphasis mine).

Imitation

The final area of the model is what I have termed imitation; the need for pastors to serve as models for their congregants. Nearly every biological father has heard and/or experienced the fact that his entire life is being analyzed and inspected. Every moment a father spends with his children is, for better or worse, an instructive moment. Through both their leisure and their work, children are given a front row seat to the inner lives of their fathers that often speaks louder than any words spoken. Throughout the course of each day fathers are teaching their children their habits, their values and their vision of the world around them. They are teaching them how to handle conflict and stress, how to play and how to celebrate. They are teaching them how to love and express themselves and, ultimately, fathers who claim to be Christians are teaching their children what it means to be a follower of Christ. As Gary Thomas writes, “Although we can reproduce children who look like us in a single act of sexual intimacy, the real reproduction is a spiritual one – living our lives out in front of our children who will choose to imitate us in dramatic ways. This is a spiritual inheritance of a dramatic order.”³⁰

While many fathers intentionally develop the spiritual lives of their families through disciplines of family devotions, times of prayer and elaborate family mission statements, many biological fathers will be equally successful at reproducing in their children their lack of desire for spirituality. Speaking about the extensive Grant Study³¹ conducted over the course of several decades by Harvard University, George Vaillant made the startling observation that in over ninety-five percent of the cases “fathers were

³⁰ Gary Thomas, *Sacred Parenting* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 171.

³¹ The Grant Study is the term designated to 268 Harvard graduates from the classes of 1939-1944 whose lives have been studied for decades as part of Harvard’s “Study of Adult Development.”

either cited as negative examples or were mentioned as people who were *not* influences.”³² Despite the fact that fathers may not identify as role models does not change the reality that modeling is still occurring simply because fathers live their lives before their children.

This dynamic is no less true for pastors who often speak of the pressure of living in “the fish bowl;” that nearly universal experience of having one’s life scrutinized by one’s congregation.³³ The movies pastors watch, the beverages they drink, how they spend their vacations and the way they lead staff meetings are just a handful of ways in which pastors find themselves living out their sermons on a weekly basis. In fact, the importance of modeling a life worth imitating is perhaps one of the areas that spiritual and biological fathers have most in common. Sociologists and psychologists have agreed for years that in regards to parenting, “imitation, or modeling, is one of the most potent learning processes.”³⁴

At one point in an interview a pastor relayed to me that during his annual review his elders shared with him their growing desire to be given greater opportunity to join him during his trips to the hospital so that they could learn how to minister to one another more effectively. In his own words the pastor told me his elders communicated to him the following, “you don’t need us as much as we need you. You know, you’re waiting in the lobby and we’re 10 minutes late so you could be up and out of there by the time we get there. It’s not about what you need, but we need to know how to visit and shepherd

³² George Vaillant, *Adaption to Life* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 218.

³³ Marc Brunson and James W. Bryant, *The New Guidebook for Pastors* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing, 2007), 55.

³⁴ David Popenoe, *Life Without Father*, 142.

people...will you bring us along with you? "The desire of these elders to join the pastor on his journeys to the hospital reflects sentiments captured by Edgar Guest's poem "Sermons We See."

I'd rather see a sermon
than hear one any day;
I'd rather one should walk with me
than merely tell the way.
The eye's a better pupil
and more willing than the ear,
Fine counsel is confusing,
but example's always clear;
And the best of all preachers
are the men who live their creeds,
For to see good put in action
is what everybody needs.
I soon can learn to do it
if you'll let me see it done;
I can watch your hands in action,
but your tongue too fast may run.
And the lecture you deliver
may be very wise and true,
But I'd rather get my lessons
by observing what you do;
For I might misunderstand you
and the high advice you give,
But there's no misunderstanding
how you act and how you live.³⁵

While many metaphors do a good job of capturing various aspects of pastoral ministry, the father metaphor embraces the reality that part of the pastoral role is shaper and influencer, providing the model of a life. In the same way that the exhortation "do what I say, not what I do" falls on deaf ears of children, so too does it fail to work very well on a congregations who need to know that pastors are taking the same medicine they offer their congregations.³⁶ Before they will chose to follow the instruction they receive

³⁵ Edgar A. Guest, "Sermons We See" in *Masterpieces of Religious Verse*, Alleyne Ireland (Ney York: Harper Brother Publishers, 1948), 361.

from the pulpit, congregants want to see sermons manifested in the lives of their pastors. They are searching for lives worthy of imitation.

Interestingly, the explicit notion of serving as a model for congregants was almost unanimously missing from the interviews I held with pastors. The virtual silence is a notable one amidst conversations that centered around the pastors' self-identified priority on preaching and teaching. Again, while the role of preaching is, and should be, central in the life of the church, it cannot ever serve as a substitute for a holy life lived before the people as an example. As one author wrote, "The best preachers are heard before they ever preach, not during their sermon nor because of it...Far more important than what is said is who said it."³⁷

I would argue that one potential reason for this absence is that, of the three areas in this proposed model, imitation is the most difficult because pastors are deeply aware of their own sinfulness. In this way pastors share much in common with parents who may be gripped with anxiety when they stare in the mirror and confront the reality that, despite the words of instruction they might give to their children, the best determiner of who their child will be is the person staring back at them.

As was discussed throughout this paper, one of the most potent aspects of leadership is the art of modeling. As Kouzes and Posner discuss in their seminal book *The Leadership Challenge*,

It is not enough for leaders to simply deliver a rousing speech or talk about lofty ideals or promising futures. Compelling words may be essential to lifting people's spirits, but leaders know that constituents are more deeply moved by

³⁶ David Hansen, "Who's Listening Out There?" *Preaching to a Shifting Culture*, edited by Scott Gibson (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004), 144.

³⁷ Calvin Miller, *Preaching: The Art of Narrative Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2006), 25.

deeds...Leaders take every opportunity to show others by their own example that they are deeply committed to the values and aspirations they espouse. Leading by example is how leaders make visions and values tangible.³⁸

In biblical language the New Testament writers employ the word “imitation” or “example” to capture this same notion. Even a cursory glance at the New Testament reveals this ongoing commitment on the part of the apostles. Paul urged the church at Corinth to “be imitators of me” (1 Cor 14:16) and to those gathered at Phillipi he said, “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me- put it into practice” (Phil 4:9). Twice in the book of Hebrews the author exhorts the readers to follow the model of their leaders reminding them to “imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised”... and to “Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith” (Heb 6:12; 13:7). Furthermore, when Peter addressed pastors specifically he charged them to be “examples to the flock” (1 Pet 5:3). These words echo the sentiments of Henri Nouwen who advocated for pastors to view their lives as “living reminders.” Nouwen writes,

When we speak about the minister as a living reminder of God, we are not speaking about a technical specialty which can be mastered through the acquisition of specific tools, techniques and skills, but about a way of being which embraces the totality of life: working and resting, eating and drinking, praying and playing, acting and waiting. Before any professional skill, we need a spirituality, a way of living in the spirit by which all we are and all we do becomes a form of reminding...The emphasis on ministry as a profession that has dominated our thinking during the past several decades may have led us to put too much confidence in our abilities, skills, techniques, projects, and programs. In so doing, we have lost touch with the reality with which *we are called to connect, not so much by what we do, but by who we are.*³⁹

In regards to preaching specifically, Prime and Begg offered a similarly weighty

³⁸ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 77.

³⁹ Nouwen, *The Living Reminder*, 27-28 (emphasis mine).

statement noting, “The preacher’s gift proves its value to the body of Christ as his character demonstrates the truth of what he declares.”⁴⁰ Calvin Miller agreed in his own work *Preaching* when he observed,

The answer is not to shout down their secularity or scream at them for being so secular but to role model what’s missing in their lives. What’s missing is spiritual heritage and destiny. But generally when they are led to address their secular lifestyle, they often look at the preacher and fail to see any contrast in the values he cherishes with those they hold.⁴¹

The sobering truth of pastoral leadership is that ministers have a seemingly disproportionate amount of influence over the lives of others in comparison to the influence granted to laity which results in James stating simply, “Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly (Jas 3:1). Reflecting on this reality one pastor wrote, “When a Christian falls into sin, he hurts others. When a Christian leader falls into sin, he hurts many others. A big tree cannot fall without lots of smaller trees falling with it.”⁴² One needs only to watch the evening news to grasp the truth of this statement. The far reaching devastation brought upon a community when a pastor fails morally when compared to the effects on that same community when a congregant fails in the same manner cannot be ignored. The principle is no less true in biological families where, again, an important influence is laid at the feet of fathers.⁴³

However, that is not to say that followers are the only ones being affected in the pastoral relationship. In fact the father metaphor calls pastors to be more consciously

⁴⁰ Prime and Begg, *On Being Pastor*, 37.

⁴¹ Calvin Miller, *Preaching*, 29.

⁴² Prime and Begg, *On Being Pastor*, 38.

⁴³ Popenoe, *Life Without Father*, 10-11.

aware of the highly organic and relational nature of their vocation whereby the leader is in a position to be influenced by the model of their followers as well. This point is one in which the father metaphor for pastoral ministry can become particularly instructive, for familial metaphors alone capture this dynamic in a way that few other metaphors can.

One of the reasons for this is that metaphors such as gardener and potter (to name just a few) suggest a certain kind of passivity on the part of the followers. To view the congregation as clay or soil is to assume a certain level of distance between leader and follower. Similarly shepherds and CEOs stand in a rather guarded place; afforded the opportunity to shape others in a way that is disproportionate from the shaping they themselves receive. As noted earlier, one pastor told me that he thought that pastors appreciated the “difference in type” that other metaphors afforded them. There are fundamental differences between sheep and shepherds as there is between potters and clay, or gardeners and soil; one will never become completely independent of other. In other words, according to this pastor, the father metaphor may be best suited to break down the already existing boundaries by which pastors are looked upon as spiritual gurus whose super-spiritual lives can never be mimicked by followers. Through the father metaphor modeling takes on literal flesh as pastors are called to constantly remember their own spiritual birth as they interact with those under their care. In turn, spiritual children have a guide who not only reminds them who they are, but is a living testimony of who they are becoming, leaders who are made of the same material.

By embracing this three-fold definition of the father metaphor of identity, instruction and imitation, pastors can begin to speak about the father metaphor with a common language and can begin to minister to their spiritual families with a familiar

framework. The need for such a model in an era of confusion for both pastors and biological fathers in America is clear, as is the fact that choosing the metaphors we live by is deeply personal and, often, subconscious act. Hence, my simple goal throughout this work is to raise the awareness for the next generation of pastors that there are still other metaphors available to us as we attempt to work at our craft.

As long as the world contains biological fathers who fail their children in any way, the father metaphor in pastoral ministry will have a myriad of critics. Yet, despite the number of criticisms leveled against the father metaphor, I fully agree with one pastor who affirmed “reclaiming that is probably the lost language of the church.”

Suggestions for Further Study

Admittedly, this research focused exclusively on the male gender. A key area of research would be to explore the way women in ministry might connect to a maternal metaphor. While there are a great number of similarities between mothers and fathers, the fact that Paul employed both maternal and paternal imagery suggests that there are also sufficient differences to be explored in regards to pastoral ministry.

Furthermore, while this particular study explored the father metaphor from the point view of view of the pastor, it would be equally as beneficial to conduct similar research to explore how congregants view the use of the father metaphor by their pastor. According to the pastors I interviewed, many suggested that they are already viewed by their parishioners as a father-figure, but they themselves feel it is a pejorative term. Therefore it would be important to explore the perspective of the congregants to discern whether pastors are accurate in this assumption.

Additional research could be conducted on the father metaphor through a variety

of ethnic, socio-economic and denominational lenses. Does race, income or denominational affiliation affect the degree to which the metaphor is embraced or rejected? Furthermore, while this study specifically dealt with Protestant pastors, further study could be done to discern the perception of pastors and congregations within denominations that employ the father title officially for their ministers such as Roman Catholics and Anglicans.

Finally, it would be interesting to note how single pastors, divorced pastors and those without children might respond to the father metaphor. What unique perspective would such pastors bring to bear on the metaphorical image of fatherhood? Related to this, it would be of great interest to explore how pastors who experienced either an absent father, uninvolved and distant father, or did not know or have a biological father might respond to the metaphor as well.

APPENDIX A

Table of Data Evaluation

Inhibitors

1. Infrequent use of the metaphor
2. Professional Boundaries
 - a. Does not apply to all areas of their ministry
 - i. Administration
 - ii. Finances
 - iii. Building
 - b. Personal/Cultural Boundaries
 - i. Age
 - ii. Tradition (denominational)
 - iii. Pejorative/Arrogant
 - iv. Ministering to broken/dysfunctional families
 - v. Pastor's Personal relationship w/ father
 - vi. Scriptural prohibition
 - c. Pastor's views of expectations
 - i. Primarily teacher/preacher
 - ii. Vision cater/leading
 - iii. Counseling was low
3. Promoters
 - a. Congregants expectations
 - i. Always available
 - ii. Practical problem solving (career, finances, decision making, relationships)
 - iii. All knowing
 - b. Congregants identity their Pastor as father
 - i. Shepherd was only mentioned once
 - c. Pastors see the applicability of the father metaphor
 - i. Discipline
 - ii. Counseling
 - iii. Teaching/Mentoring

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

1. Are there particular metaphors that shape your ministry? If so, which ones? (Examples include shepherd, CEO, prophet, head of the body, etc...)
2. Of these metaphors which one frames your ministry most often?
3. What do believe are the implications of the ministry metaphors you employ?
4. Please list your *explicit* (job description), primary responsibilities as a pastor?
5. Please list your *implicit* (unspoken) responsibilities as a pastor?
6. What metaphors do you believe shape the thinking of your congregation regarding your role?
7. How dominant in your leadership is the father metaphor?
8. In what ways to you identify with the father metaphor in your pastoral role?
9. In what ways do you NOT identify with the father metaphor in your pastoral role?
10. Is there anything that inhibits your use of the father metaphor more often?

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Name: Stephen L. Woodworth

Place of Birth: Haverhill, MA

Date of Birth: February 6, 1976

Education

B.S. (Outdoor Education), Montreat College (Montreat, NC)

M.Div., Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (Charlotte)

D.Min., (Christian Leadership) Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (Charlotte)

Period of Studies: May 2009- May 2012

Expected Graduation: May 2012